



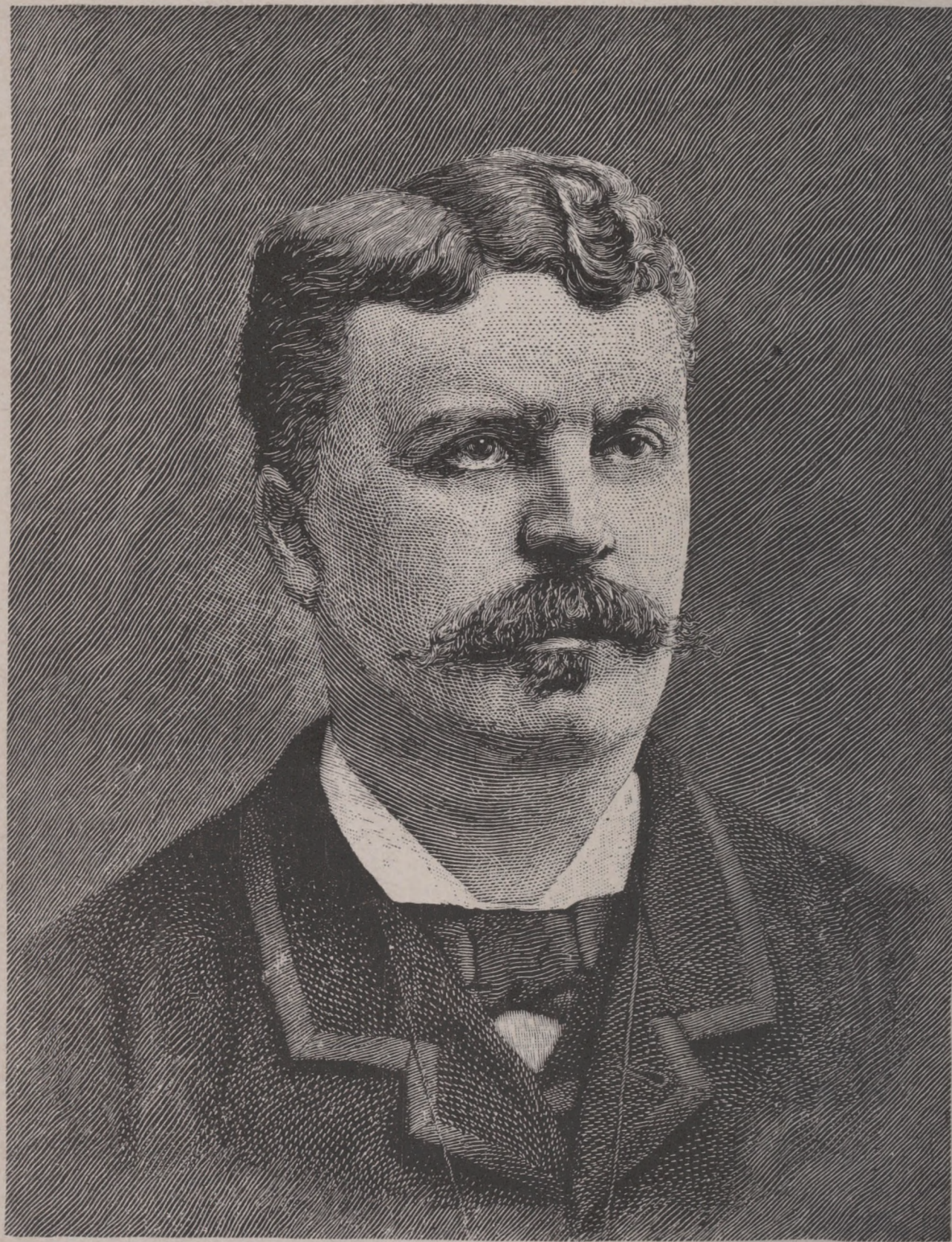


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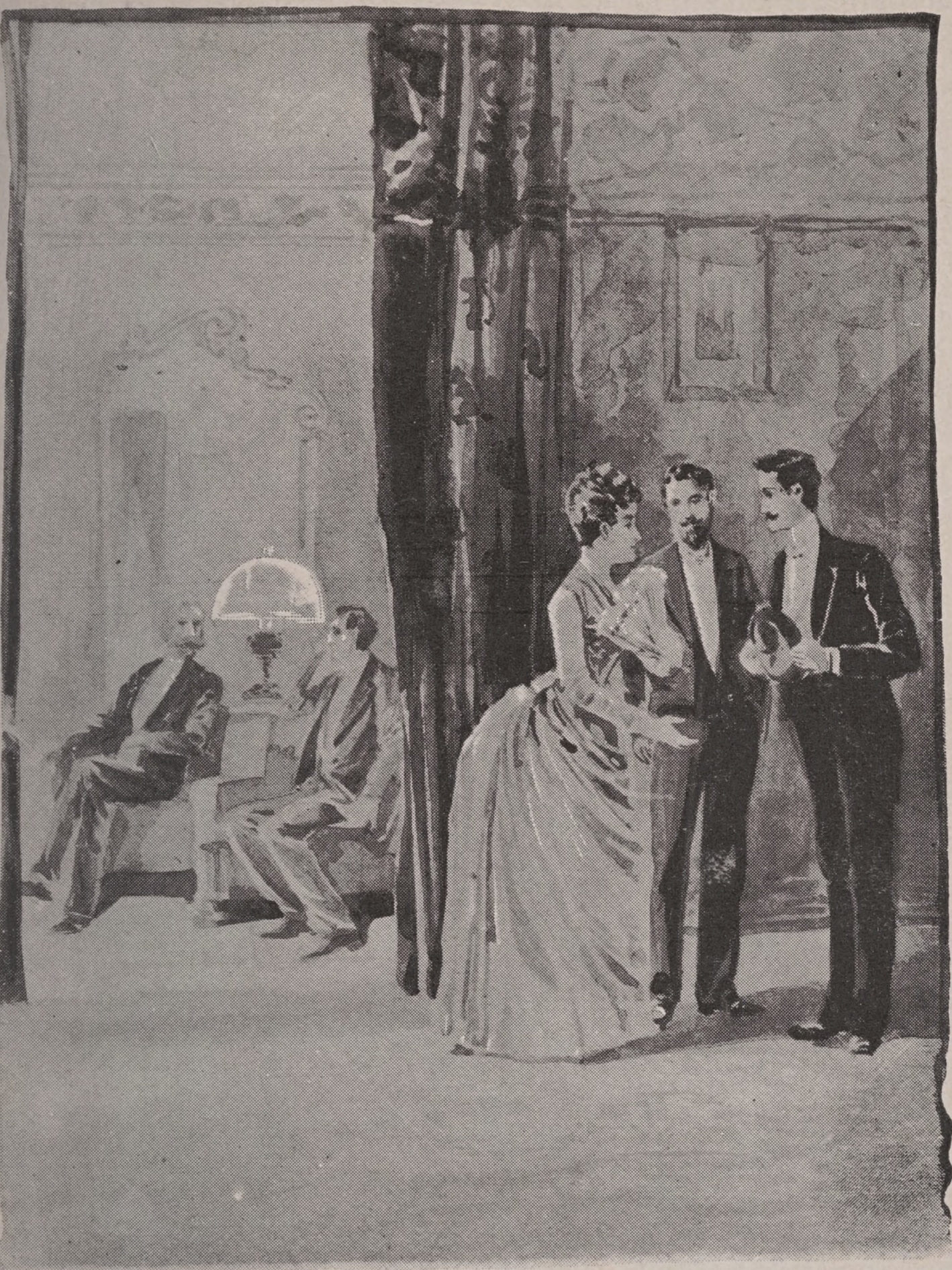
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NOTRE COEUR

(THE HUMAN HEART)



Luy de Maupassant



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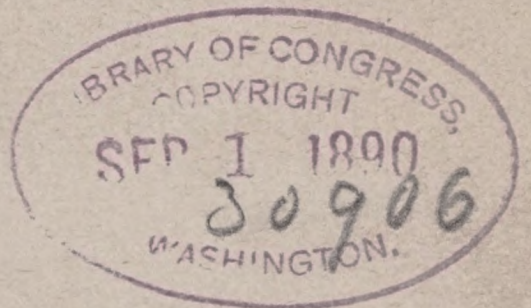
BY

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

AUTHOR OF

"PIERRE ET JEAN," "LA MAIN GAUCHE," ETC

TRANSLATED BY ALEXINA LORANGER DONOVAN



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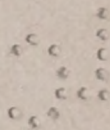
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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

ONE day Massival, the musician, and celebrated author of *Rébecca*, who for the past fifteen years has been known as "the young and illustrious master," said to his friend, André Mariolle:

"Why have you never been presented to Mme. Michèle de Burne? I assure you that she is one of the most fascinating women of new Paris."

"Because I feel that I was not born for her circle."

"You are wrong, my dear friend. Her drawing-room is original; very new, very lively, and very artistic. The music is excellent, the conversation as interesting as in the

first salons of the last century. You would be appreciated there; first, because you play the violin to perfection, then, because they frequently speak of you, and, finally, because you are known to be neither commonplace nor prodigal with your visits."

Flattered, but still resisting, supposing, moreover, that the young woman was not ignorant of this pressing invitation, Mariolle, who was reluctant to show his eagerness, answered, indifferently :

"Peuh! I care but little."

"Shall I present you one of these days?" rejoined Massival. "You already know her, however, for we, her intimate friends, speak of her so frequently. She is a very pretty woman of twenty-eight, quite intelligent, and has no wish to marry again, having been very unhappy in her first choice. Her house has become a rendezvous of agreeable men. You will never find too many of one circle, only enough of each for effect. She would be enchanted to receive you."

"So be it," answered Mariolle, conquered. "You may present me one of these days."

Early in the following week the musician called on Mariolle, and asked:

“Will you be at liberty to-morrow?”

“Why — yes.”

“Very well. I will take you to dine with Mme. de Burne. She has intrusted me with an invitation for you. However, here is a note from her.”

After a few seconds of reflection, for form's sake, Mariolle announced his readiness to accept the invitation.

André Mariolle was about thirty-seven years of age, a bachelor, and without a profession; rich enough to live as he pleased, to travel, and even to possess a pretty collection of modern paintings and rare knickknacks. He was known as a man of intelligence, somewhat eccentric, unsociable, capricious, but inclined to haughtiness; one who posed as a recluse rather more from pride than timidity. Talented, witty but indolent, quick to understand, and perhaps qualified to do many things, he was contented to enjoy existence as a spectator, or rather as an amateur. Had he been poor, he would have undoubtedly become a remarkable or even a celebrated man; being

born wealthy, he eternally reproached himself for having achieved nothing. True, he had made divers though feeble attempts in the direction of the arts; one toward literature, in publishing an interesting account of travels, written in a clever and pleasing style; another, in the direction of music by practicing the violin; in this he had acquired, even among the members of the profession, a renown as a very good amateur; one toward sculpture, that art in which original skill or the gift of chiseling bold and deceptive figures, replaces knowledge and study in the eyes of the ignorant. His statuette in clay, *Masseur tunisien*, had even obtained some favorable notice in the Salon of the preceding year.

A fine horseman, and, it was also said, a skillful swordsman, although he never fenced in public, influenced in this, probably, by the same motives which made him avoid the world where serious rivalries were to be feared.

Nevertheless, his friends appreciated and praised him unanimously, perhaps because he did not rival them. He was said to be a devoted and a reliable friend, agreeable in manners and of a sympathetic disposition.

Of rather tall stature, he wore his black beard short on the cheeks and coming to a fine point at the chin ; his crispy hair was slightly tinged with gray—in fine, he presented a good appearance, with his brown eyes, which were bright, quick, distrustful, and a little severe.

His intimate friends, who were mostly artists, among whom were the writer Gaston de Lamarthe ; Massival, the musician ; Jobin, Rivollet, and de Maudol, the painters, appeared to prize his sense, his friendship, his intelligence, and even his judgment ; although among themselves, with that vanity which is inseparable from acquired success, he was considered as a very amiable and intelligent failure.

His haughty reserve seemed to say : “ I am nothing because I will it so.” He therefore lived in a narrow circle, disdaining the elegant gallantries of the fashionable drawing-rooms, where others more brilliant than he might have thrown him back into the army of mere worldly figures. He visited only those houses where his hidden and serious qualities would be surely appreciated ;

and, if he had consented so quickly to accept Mme. Michèle de Burne's invitation, it was because his best friends, they who proclaimed his merits everywhere, were frequent visitors at her house.

Mme. de Burne occupied a pretty entresol, Rue du Général-Foy, in the rear of Saint Augustin. Two of the rooms overlooked the street: the drawing-room, in which she received everybody, and the dining room; two others faced a beautiful garden, which was attached to the house. The first of these was a second drawing-room, very large and of rectangular shape, with three windows shaded by trees, the leaves of which rustled against the eaves of the house. This room was furnished and decorated with objects of art, exceptionally rare and simple, of exquisite taste and great value. The seats, tables, small buffets or what-nots, and paintings, the fans and small porcelain figures under glass, the vases, statuettes, and the enormous clock in the center of a panel, the whole of the decorations of this apartment attracted and retained the eye by its form, age, or its elegance. To create this interior, of which

she was almost as proud as of herself, she had availed herself of all the knowledge, friendship, good-will and ferreting instincts of the artists whom she knew. As she was rich and liberal, they had found for her all the animated things of that original character which the vulgar amateur cannot distinguish; thus through them she had made a unique habitation, difficult to enter, where she imagined her friends were more pleased, and returned more willingly, than to the commonplace drawing-rooms of the women of the world.

It was even one of her favorite theories to pretend that the tints of the hangings and tapestries, the comfort of the seats, the elegance of forms, the beauty of the whole, caressed, captivated and enraptured the eyes as much as the pretty smiles. She was accustomed to say, that apartments were either sympathetic or antipathetic, rich or poor, and that, like the beings who inhabited them, they attracted, retained or repelled. They awakened or benumbed the heart, warmed or chilled the mind, made persons talkative or silent, rendered them gay or sad;

in fact, gave to each visitor an uncontrollable desire to remain or go away.

Near the middle of this somewhat somber gallery, a grand piano, between two vases of flowers, occupied a place of honor, and assumed the airs of a master. Further on, a lofty door in two panels divided this room from the bed-room, which, in turn, opened into the dressing-room. It was also large and elegant, hung with chintz like a summer parlor; and this was where Mme. de Burne, when alone, spent most of her time.

Married to a polished scoundrel—one of those domestic tyrants before whom all must bow—she had been very unhappy. During five years she had to submit to the exactions, severities, jealousies, and even to the violence of this intolerable master; and, terrified, paralyzed by surprise, she had lived without revolting before this revelation of conjugal life, crushed under the despotic and torturing will of the male brute of whom she was the prey.

While returning home one night, he died from the rupture of an artery; and, when the body of her husband was carried in, enveloped in a covering, she had gazed at it, unable to

believe in the reality of this deliverance, with a profound joy and a great fear that it would be visible.

Of an independent nature, gay, even exuberant, very vivacious and fascinating with those witty sallies which are sown, no one knows how, in the minds of certain young girls of Paris, who seem to have inhaled, during infancy, the peppery breath of the boulevards, with which is mingled each night, through the open doors of the theaters, the sound of applause or hisses of the play. She had, however, retained from her five years of slavery a timidity singularly mixed with her former forwardness; a great fear of saying or doing too much, with an ardent desire for emancipation, and an energetic determination of never again compromising her liberty.

Her husband, man of the world, had taught her to receive like a dumb slave, at once elegant, polite, and ornamental. Among the friends of this despot were a number of artists, whom she had received with curiosity and listened to with pleasure, without daring to show how well she understood and appreciated them.

As soon as her term of mourning was over, she invited a few to dinner one evening. Two of the invited guests sent excuses, three others accepted, and were astonished to find a charming and open-hearted young woman, who made them feel at ease at once, and who told them gracefully what pleasure it had been to her to receive them formerly.

Little by little she then made from among her former acquaintances, who had either ignored or misunderstood her, a choice according to her own tastes ; and began to receive as a widow or a free woman, but as one who wished to remain respectable, gathering around her all the desirable men of Paris, with only a few women.

The first admitted into her circle became intimate friends ; they formed a basis and attracted others, giving to the house the appearance of a small court, where each frequenter brought either merit or a name, for several carefully chosen titles were associated with the intellectual commonalty.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who occupied apartments above her own, served as a chap-eron and a badge of dignity. He was an old

gallant, elegant, intellectual, and very attentive to her, treating her more as a woman of the world than as a daughter. He presided at her Thursday dinners, which soon became well known and cited through Paris, and were also much sought after. The demands for presentations and invitations that poured in, were discussed, and frequently rejected after a sort of vote in the circle of intimates. Witty sayings emanated from the circle, and went the rounds of society. Actors, artists and young poets made their debut there, and this became a veritable baptism of renown. Long-haired artists brought by Gaston de Lamarthe, replaced near the piano the Hungarian violonists presented by Massival; and exotic *danseuses* executed their difficult poses there before appearing in public at l'Eden or at the Folies-Bergère.

Mme. de Burne, although jealously guarded by her friends, and retaining still a keen and repelling recollection of her married life, had the wisdom to not augment too greatly the number of her acquaintances. Satisfied, and frightened at the same time at what might be said or thought of her, she abandoned herself

to her bohemian instincts with great plebeian prudence. She clung to her renown, avoided all rashness, keeping her whims within bounds, and, moderate in her audacity, was careful that no one should suspect her of a *liaison*, love-making or intrigue.

All had tried to become her lovers ; none, it was said, had succeeded. They confessed and admitted it to each other with surprise, for men are slow, and perhaps with reason, to admit of virtue in an independent woman. A legend was whispered amongst them. It was said that her husband, at the beginning of their married life, had acted in such a brutal manner that she was forever cured of love for men. Her intimate friends often discussed this phase of her character, and infallibly came to this conclusion: That a young girl brought up to dream of future tenderness in conjugal life, must have been inexpressibly shocked at the exigencies of marriage when revealed by a profligate.

That worldly philosopher, George de Maltre, would laugh softly, and add :

“ Her hour will come. It always does for that sort of women. The later it comes, the

louder it will strike. With the artistic taste of our friend, she is certain to eventually love a singer or pianist."

Gaston de Lamarthe thought otherwise. In his quality of novelist, observer and psychologist, devoted to the study of the people of the world, of whom he drew accurate and ironical portraits, he professed to understand and analyze women with an infallible and unique penetration. He classed Mme. de Burne amongst the mistaken ones of the day, a type he had portrayed in his interesting novel: "*Une d'Elles*." He was the first to describe that new race of women agitated by hysterical fits of reasoning, moved by a thousand contradictory impulses, which do not even become desires, disenchanted with all things without having tasted anything, either through the fault of circumstances, of the actual times, or of modern writings; and who, without ardor, without enthusiasm, seem to combine the whims of a spoiled child with the dryness of an old skeptic.

He, like the rest, had failed in his attempts to become her lover.

For all these faithful followers had each in

turn been in love with Mme. de Burne, and, after the crisis, continued to be affected in different degrees. Little by little they had formed a small congregation. She was the Madonna of whom they spoke incessantly among themselves, held under the charm even far from her. They toasted her, praised, criticised or depreciated her, according to the day, the rivalries, irritations or preferences she had shown. They were continually jealous, and distrusted each other, but agreed above all things that the circle around her be kept tightly closed, that no redoubtable rival might present himself. There were seven of them: Massival; Gaston de Lamarthe; big Fresnol, the young philosopher and man of the world, so much in vogue; George de Maltry, celebrated for his paradoxes, his complicated eruditions, eloquent and always of the latest, incomprehensible even by his most passionate admirers, and also renowned for his dress, which was always as odd as his theories. To these she had added a few men of the world, reputed witty; Count de Marantin, Baron de Gravil, and two or three others.

The two most favored of this chosen army appeared to be Massival and Lamarthe; they seemed to possess the charm of always interesting the young woman, who was amused by their off-hand manners, their jokes, and their skill in making fun of everybody, and even a little of herself when she would tolerate it. But the care (natural or assumed) which she took of never showing to any of her admirers a prolonged or marked predilection, the mischievous and unconstrained manner of her coquetteries, and the equal distribution of her favors, maintained amongst them a friendship seasoned with hostilities, and an intellectual ardor that was very amusing.

Once in a while, one of them, to vex the rest, would present a friend. But as this friend was never very eminent, or interesting even, the others, who were leagued against him, did not oppose him very strongly.

It was in this manner that Massival introduced his friend André Mariolle into the house.

A servant, in black, called out their names:

“Monsieur Massival!”

“Monsieur Mariolle!”

Under a cloud of rosy silk, which served as a shade for a large lamp, supported by a column of gilded bronze, and which cast a brilliant light on a square table of antique marble, the heads of a woman and of three men were bowed over an album that Lamarthe had just brought. In their midst stood the writer, turning the leaves and giving explanations.

One of the heads turned, and Mariolle, who was advancing, saw a face, bright, fair and a little rosy, the hair clinging to her temples, and seeming to burn them like the flames of brushwood. The delicate and slightly *retroussé* nose seemed to make the face smile; the mouth clearly outlined by the lips, the dimples in the cheeks, the slightly projecting chin, gave the face an air of mischief, while the eyes, by a singular contrast, gave it a shade of melancholy. They were blue, of a faded blue, as if they had been washed, rubbed, worn-out; and the black pupils shining in their center were round and dilated. Their brilliant and singular expression seemed to tell of dreams of morphine, or, perhaps, of only the simple coquettish artifice of belladonna.

Mme. de Burne advanced toward them, extending her hand to welcome her new guests.

“ I have long requested my friends to bring you here,” said she to Mariolle, “ but I am obliged to repeat these things many times before I am obeyed.”

She was tall, elegant, a little slow in her movements, and slightly décolleté, showing only the tips of her pink shoulders, which the light rendered incomparably beautiful. Her hair was not red, however, but of that nameless hue seen in certain dead leaves burned by autumn.

She presented Mariolle to her father, who bowed and extended his hand.

The men, in three groups, were conversing familiarly together; seeming to feel quite at home in a sort of habitual circle where the presence of a woman added an air of gallantry.

Big Fresnol was conversing with the Count de Marantin. The constant visits of Fresnol, and the predilection shown for him by Mme. de Burne, vexed and often angered her friends. Still young, but big as a puffing, inflated rubber man, almost without beard, his head enveloped in a vague cloud of light downy hair,

vulgar, tiresome and ridiculous, he possessed but one merit—disagreeable in the eyes of other men, but essential in those of the young woman—and this was, that he loved her blindly, more and better than all the world. They had baptized him “the seal” in the circle. Although married he had never spoken of bringing his wife, who was said to be very jealous.

Lamarthe and Massival were especially indignant at the favorable notice Mme. de Burne accorded this puffed figure. But when they could no longer abstain from reproaching her for her egotistical, vulgar and doubtful taste, she would reply, with a smile:

“I like him as I would a good faithful poodle.”

George de Maltry and Gaston de Lamarthe, meanwhile, were discussing the most recent and as yet uncertain discoveries of the microbiologists. M. de Maltry developed this thesis with infinite and subtile observations and ideas; and the novelist, Lamarthe, accepted them with enthusiasm and with that facility with which men of letters receive, without reserve, all that appears to them new and original.



This philosopher of high life was blonde, a flaxen blonde, tall and thin, and dressed in a coat which was very tight on the hips. His delicate head was covered with blonde and flat hair, seeming almost pasted to it.

As to Lamarthe, Gaston de Lamarthe, to whom his particles had inoculated some pretensions of the gentleman and man of the world, he was above all a man of letters, a pitiless and terrible man of letters, armed with an eye that gathered in every detail of face, attitude, and gesture, with the rapidity and precision of photography; endowed with a penetration, with a talent for romance as natural as the scent of the hunting-dog, he laid up material for his profession from morning till night. With these two very simple senses, a clear vision for forms, and an instinctive intuition of what was underneath, he gave to his books, in which appeared none of the ordinary intentions of psychological writers, but which seemed like pieces of human existence torn from the reality, the color, the tone, the aspect, the movement of life itself.

The apparition of each of his works aroused in society agitations, suppositions, joy and

anger; for it was asserted that the characters, scarcely hidden under a torn mask, were always recognized; his passage through a drawing-room always left a shade of uneasiness. Moreover, he had published a volume of personal recollections, wherein a number of men and women in his circle of acquaintances were portrayed, clearly without malevolent intentions, but with such exactitude and severity that they had felt wounded. Some one had surnamed him "*Gare aux amis.*"

He possessed an enigmatical soul and a closed heart. It was said that he had once loved a woman who had made him suffer, and he now revenged himself on the rest of mankind.

He and Massival understood each other quite well, although the musician was of an entirely different nature; more open, more expansive, less violent, perhaps, but more visibly sensitive. After two grand successes, the first being a work played at Brussels and afterward in Paris, where it had been received with great applause at l'Opera-Comique; then a second, received and interpreted at

once at the Grand Opera, and welcomed as the announcement of a wonderful talent, he had been overtaken by that sort of stoppage which seems to strike the majority of artists of the present day like a premature paralysis. They do not grow old in success and fame as did their fathers, but seem threatened with impotency in their prime. Lamarthe had said: "There are none but abortive great men in France at the present day."

Of late Massival had been unusually devoted to Mme. de Burne, and this had been remarked by the circle; as he now kissed her hand with an air of adoration all eyes were turned in his direction.

"Are we late?" he asked.

"No, I am still awaiting Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane," she replied.

"Ah! the Marquise, how fortunate! We shall then have music this evening."

"I hope so."

The two tardy guests soon arrived. The Marquise was a rather small woman of Italian origin, with black eyes, eye-lashes, eye-brows, and hair so black and thick as to almost conceal the brow and menace the eyes. She

was said to possess the most remarkable voice heard in the fashionable drawing-rooms of Paris.

The Baron, a hollow-crowned, large-headed, and respectable man, was never complete without his violoncello. Being a passionate lover of music, he visited only those houses where music was honored.

Dinner being announced, Mme. de Burne took the arm of André Mariolle and allowed all the other guests to pass first. Then, just at the moment of following, as the two were left alone for one instant, she cast one side-long glance at him out of her pale eyes with their dark lashes, in which he discerned a woman's thought, more complicated and interested than pretty women are accustomed to bestow when receiving a gentleman to dinner for the first time.

The dinner was slow and monotonous. Lamarthe was nervous and hostile to everybody; not openly hostile, as he wished to appear well bred, but armed with that almost imperceptible ill-humor that restrains the easy flow of conversation. Massival, concentrated, preoccupied, ate but little, and from

time to time cast furtive glances at his hostess, who appeared to be anywhere but at home. Inattentive, smiling her replies, then suddenly becoming grave, she must have been thinking of something which, if it did not very much preoccupy, certainly interested her more than her guests on this particular evening. Nevertheless she was attentive to the Marquise and to Mariolle; but it was from duty and habit, her mind being visibly absent from herself and her surroundings. Fresnol and M. de Maltry were quarreling over poetry; Fresnol setting up the arguments of a man of the world, and de Maltry those perceptions, incomprehensible to the vulgar, of the more complicated writer of verses.

Several times during dinner, Mariolle again encountered the searching gaze of the young woman, but more vague, less fixed and curious. The Marquise de Bratiane, Count Marantin and Baron de Gravil formed one group and talked of everything.

During the evening, Massival, who had become more and more melancholy, seated himself at the piano and struck a few chords. This seemed to awaken Mme. de Burne, and

she soon made up a repertoire of her favorite pieces, and a concert followed.

The marquise was in good voice, and, animated by the presence of Massival, she sang like a veritable artist; the master accompanied her with the same grave face he always assumed when at the piano, his long hair brushing his coat collar, and mingling with his silky, curly beard. Many women had loved him, and pursued him, it was said. Mme. de Burne seated herself near the piano, listening attentively to the music; and, although her eyes were fixed on him, she seemed not to see him. Mariolle began to feel a little jealous — not exactly jealous of “him and her,” but, seeing this womanly gaze fixed on an illustrious man, his masculine vanity was wounded by that sentiment of classification which women make of men according to the fame they have acquired. He had frequently suffered in secret from contact with renowned men whom he had met when in the presence of “one” whose favors are for many the supreme recompense of success.

About ten o'clock the Countess de Fremines and two Jewish bankers' wives arrived in

close succession. The conversation then turned on a marriage just announced, and a prospective divorce.

Mariolle was looking at Mme. de Burne, who was now sitting near a column that supported an enormous lamp.

Her delicate and slightly *retroussé* nose, the dimples in her cheeks and chin, gave her face an expression of childish mischief, notwithstanding the fact that she was nearly thirty years of age, and that look of a faded flower which lighted up her face with a disquieting light. Under the brightness of the light which inundated her, her skin was like white velvet, while her hair seemed truly colored by the autumn sun which tints and burns the dead leaves.

She felt this manly gaze which came to her from the other end of the room ; and soon she arose, went toward him smiling, as we reply to a call.

“ You must be bored, monsieur ! ” said she. “ When one is not acclimatized in a house, it is always wearisome.”

She took a seat beside him, and they began to converse pleasantly at once. It was instan-

taneous with both ; like a piece of tinder touched with a lighted match. They felt as though they had already communicated to each other their opinions and sensations ; that one nature and one education, the same inclination, the same tastes, had already predisposed and destined them to meet and understand each other.

Something of this may have been due to the tact of the young woman. But the joy that we feel at finding some one who listens to us, who understands and replies to us, who by their replies furnish us with an opportunity of showing our wit, animated him with enthusiasm. Flattered, moreover, by the manner of his reception, conquered by the challenging grace she displayed toward him, added to the charm she possessed of attracting all men, he endeavored to demonstrate to her that color of intelligence somewhat under a veil, but which was personal and delicate, and which, when he was well known and understood, always attracted rare and quick sympathies to him.

Suddenly she said to him :

“It is truly a great pleasure to converse

with you, monsieur. However, I had been warned."

He blushed, but answered boldly :

"And I, madame, had been told that you were ——"

"Say a coquette," she interrupted. "I am indeed one with people who please me. All the world knows it; I do not hide it. But you will see that my coquetries are very impartial; this permits me to keep or take back my friends without ever losing them, and to retain them around me."

She assumed a sly look, that said plainly: "Be calm and not too conceited; do not deceive yourself, for you shall have no more than the rest."

"This is called warning one's friend of the dangers surrounding him here," he replied. "Thank you, madame; I admire frankness."

She had opened the way to speak of herself; he took advantage of it. He began by complimenting her, and saw that it pleased her; then he awakened her feminine curiosity by telling her what was said of her in the different circles he frequented. She could not hide her anxiety to hear what they might

think of her existence and her tastes; but she affected a supreme indifference, though not a little disturbed.

He drew a charming portrait of an independent woman, intelligent, superior and charming; who had surrounded herself with eminent men, and yet remained an accomplished woman of the world.

She smilingly protested, with little self-contented ejaculations of dissent. She was greatly amused by all the details he gave her, and in a bantering way, and by skillful questioning, commanded a constant flow of flatteries.

As he looked at her he was thinking: "At heart she is but a child like the rest." And he completed a phrase in which he was complimenting her for her real love of art, so rare among women.

She then suddenly assumed an air of unforeseen satire, that French trait which is the marrow of our race.

Mariolle had exaggerated his praises. She showed him that she was no silly child.

"Indeed," she said, "I must admit that I know not whether it is art or artists that I love."

"How can one love artists without loving art?" he asked.

"Because they are sometimes more interesting than the men of the world."

"Yes, but they have more annoying faults."

"It is true."

"Then, you do not love music."

She suddenly became serious.

"On the contrary, I adore music. I believe I love it more than anything else. Nevertheless Massival is convinced that I know nothing about it."

"He has told you so."

"No; he thinks so."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! we women guess nearly all that we do not know."

"Then, Massival thinks you know nothing of music?"

"I am sure of it. I see it by the manner in which he explains and underlines the shadings with the air of one musing: 'It is of no use; I only do it because you are so amiable.'"

"And yet he told me that one heard better music in your home than in any other house in Paris."

“Yes ; that is true, thanks to him.”

“And do you not love literature?”

“I love it very much. I have even the pretension of feeling it strongly notwithstanding the opinion of Lamartine.”

“Who also considers that you know nothing of it.”

“Naturally!”

“But he has not told you so, either.”

“Indeed he has told me. He believes that certain women may have a delicate and accurate perception of expressed sentiment of the truth of characters, of psychology in general, but that they are totally incapable of discerning what is best in his profession, ‘art.’ Really, when he has pronounced that word ‘art,’ the best thing that can be done is to put him out of the house.”

“And you, madame, what do you think?” asked Mariolle, laughing.

She reflected a few moments, then looked him full in the face, to see if he were disposed to listen and to understand her.

“I believe that sentiment, you understand — sentiment — may introduce all to the intel-

lect of a woman; only it does not remain there always. Do you understand?"

"Not very clearly, madame."

"Well, then, to render us comprehensible to the same degree that men are, one must appeal to our feminine nature before addressing our intelligence. We are but little interested in a man who does not first render us sympathetic, for we see all things through sentiment. I do not say through love — no — through sentiment, which has all sorts of forms, manifestations, and shades. Sentiment is something that belongs to us; you do not understand it well, for it obscures you, while it enlightens us. Oh! I feel that all this is very vague to you; so much the worse. In fact, if a man loves us and is agreeable to us — for it is indispensable that we should feel that we are loved to become capable of this effort — and, if the man be a superior being, he may, by taking the trouble, make us feel all things, understand and penetrate all things, everything; and can communicate to us, little by little, shred by shred, the whole of his intelligence. Oh! all this is often effaced later, disappears, becomes obliterated,

for we forget. Oh! yes, we do forget, as the air forgets the words. We are intuitive and illuminable, but changeable, impressionable, and variable, through the things that surround us. If you knew how many states of mind I traverse that make so many different women of me, according to the time, the state of my health, what I have read or what I have heard. Truly, there are days when I have the soul of an excellent mother of a family, without children, and then there are others when I have almost that of a *cocotte* — without lovers.”

He was charmed, and asked:

“Do you, then, believe that most intelligent women are capable of this activity of mind?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Only they are asleep, and besides they have a determined existence, which attracts them one way or the other.”

“Then, at heart, it is music that you prefer to all else?”

“Yes; but what I was telling you a little while ago, is so true. Certainly I would never have tasted and adored it as I do, without that angel Massival. By teaching me how to play them, he has instilled the soul

into all the great works that I already loved so passionately. What a pity he is married!"

She laughed as she said these last words, but there was a tinge of regret in her tone that told more than all her theories on women and her admiration of art.

Massival was indeed married. Before his success and fame he had contracted one of those unions unknown artists often make, and which they regret to the end of their lives.

He never spoke of his wife, neither had he ever presented her to the world he frequented, and, although he had three children, few of his friends knew it.

Mariolle laughed. Decidedly this woman was most amusing, of a rare type, and exceedingly pretty. He could not withdraw his eyes from her, looking at her with a persistency which, however, did not trouble the young woman in the least. The face, grave and gay, with its mutinous expression, audacious nose, and voluptuous coloring of a blonde, soft and warm, lighted by the full summer of a maturity so just, so tender, so relishing, that she seemed to have reached

the year, the month, even the moment of her complete expansion.

He repeated to himself : " Is she painted ? " and he searched to find the tell-tale line, lighter or darker, at the roots of her hair ; but without discovering it.

The sound of footsteps behind him made him turn his head. Two servants were carrying the tea-table into the room, the small blue flame of the lamp causing a gentle murmuring sound of the water in the large silver kettle, which was as bright and as complicated as a chemical apparatus.

" Will you take a cup of tea ? " she asked.

When he had accepted, she arose, and with a light, graceful step approached the table where the boiling water was singing in the interior of the kettle, amidst a profusion of fruits, cakes and bonbons.

Her profile was clearly defined against the hangings of the room. Mariolle remarked the slender waist, the beautiful shoulders and the full rounded throat he had already so much admired. As her light dress trailed on the carpet behind her, making her body seem

endless, he was thinking, crudely: "She is a siren! she promises well."

She was offering refreshments to her guests, going from one to the other with a movement of exquisite grace. Mariolle was following her with his eyes, when Lamarthe, who was walking about with his cup in his hands, stopped suddenly, and asked him if they should leave together.

Mariolle assented, and, as Lamarthe complained of being tired, they left at once.

When they reached the street the writer asked: "Are you going home or to the club?"

"I shall spend an hour at the club."

"At the Tambourins?"

"Yes."

"I will accompany you to the door. Those places bore me, so I never go near them. I became a member only to have the use of the carriages."

He took the arm of Mariolle, and they walked in the direction of Saint Augustin. They had not gone many steps when Mariolle abruptly said:

"What an odd woman! What do you think of her?"

Lamarthe laughed.

“The crisis is commencing,” said he. “You will have your turn like the rest of us. I have had the disease, but I am now cured. My dear fellow, the crisis for her friends consists in speaking of her continually when they are together, whenever they meet, and wherever they may be.”

“At any rate, this is the first time for me, and that is only natural, since I scarcely know her.”

“Very well, then. Let us speak of her. You are sure to fall in love; every one does, it is inevitable.”

“Is she, then, so very enchanting?”

“Yes and no. They who love the woman of the past, the woman of soul, the woman of heart, the women of sentiment, the woman of the novel of the past, have a horror of her, and execrate her even to the extent of accusing her of infamy. Others, that is, we who have tasted the modern charms, are compelled to admit that she is delicious, provided we do not fall in love with her, and that is what we invariably do. We do not die of it, neither do we suffer much, but we are enraged be-

cause she is not different. You will surely succumb if she wishes it. Indeed, she has already captured you."

"Oh!" cried Mariolle, whose secret thought had been echoed by the words of his friend. "I am but the first comer with her, and I believe she loves titles of every kind."

"Yes, indeed, she loves them; but, at the same time, she laughs at them. The most celebrated or distinguished man will not return to her house if he does not please her; nevertheless, she is stupidly attached to that idiot Fresnol, and to that bore de Maltry. She flirts with idiots, without excuse, no one knows why; perhaps, because they amuse her more, or, it may be that, at heart, they love her more than we do, and that all women are more susceptible to that than to anything else."

Lamarthe continued to speak of her, to analyze and criticise her, frequently contradicting himself. And, as Mariolle plied him with questions, he replied with the sincere ardor of an interested man, carried away by his subject, sometimes a little vague, having his mind filled with true observations and false deductions.

“She is not alone,” he said. “There are to-day in our world fully fifty who resemble her. Take, for instance, that little Fremines, who was there this evening; she is the same type, but bolder, and married to an odd being. She makes of her house one of the asylums for the demented, the most interesting in Paris. I frequently visit that box myself.”

In the meantime, without noticing it, they had followed the boulevard Malesherbe, the rue Royale, l’avenue des Champs Elysées, and were nearing l’Arc de Triomphe, when Lamarthe suddenly looked at his watch.

“My dear friend,” said he, “we have been speaking of her for one hour and ten minutes; that suffices for to-night. Let us go to bed, I will conduct you to the club another evening.”



CHAPTER II.

It was a large and well-lighted room, the wall and ceiling hung with chintz brought from Persia by a friend in the diplomatic corps. The background was yellow, of a peculiar shade, as if it had been immersed in a cream of gold. The designs of many tints, in which predominated the Persian green, represented odd constructions of upturned eaves, around which lions with wings, antelopes with horns, were running, and birds of paradise were flying.

There was but little furniture. Three long tables of green marble held all that serves for the toilet of a woman. Large bowls of thick crystal stood on the center one; the second contained an array of bottles, boxes and vases of all shapes crowned with silver tops; on the third were found all those tools and instruments, whose complicated, mysterious,

and delicate use assist in modern coquetry. Two reclining-chairs and a few low seats of raw silk, soft, and made to rest the tired limbs or the denuded body, were spread about the room. An immense mirror covered one of the walls. It was in three panels, the two sides turning on pivots, permitting the young woman to see at once her face, her profile, and her back, thus inclosing herself in her own image. To the right, in a niche ordinarily concealed by a curtain, was a bath, or rather a deep vase, also of green marble ; it was reached by descending two steps. A bronze Cupid, designed by the sculptor Prédolé, was seated on the edge of the vase, and dispensed hot and cold water through the shells with which he played. At the farther end of this nook, a folding Venetian mirror, in several sections, reflected, in each of its parts, both the bath and the bather.

Near this was also a writing-desk, a small and beautiful piece of modern English furniture. It was covered with loose papers, folded letters, and torn envelopes, on which sparkled gilt initials. This was where she wrote her letters, and indeed lived when alone.

Seated on a reclining-chair, in a dressing-gown of china silk, her beautiful arms, bare from the shoulders, gleaming through the folds of her dress, the heavy hair coiled into a blonde mass on the top of her head, Mme. de Burne was dreaming, after her bath.

A knock at the door disturbed her, and her maid entered with a letter.

She took it, glanced at the writing, and opened it eagerly. She read the first few lines, then, turning to the servant, said, quietly: "I will ring for you in an hour."

When she was once more alone her face lighted up with a smile of victorious joy. The first words had sufficed to show her that it was a declaration of love from Mariolle. Here it was at last. He had resisted much longer than she could have believed possible. For three months she had kept him at her side by a great display of grace, attentions, and an exposition of charms she had never employed with any other. He had seemed distrustful, warned, on his guard against her, and against all the wiles of her insatiable coquetry. It had required numberless confidential conversations, into which she had thrown all the

physical seductions of her being, all the captivating efforts of her intellect, beside many evenings spent in music, when, in front of the still vibrating piano, standing before the pages of that music by the great masters, so full of soul, they had trembled with the same emotions, before she had finally perceived in his eyes that look of a conquered man, or the supplication of tenderness ready to falter. Ah! how well she knew that look, accomplished coquette that she was.

How often, with real feline skill and an inexhaustible curiosity, she had given birth to this secret torturing pain in the eyes of all the men whom she had bewitched. It amused her so to see them, little by little, invaded, conquered, dominated by her invincible womanly power of becoming to them the *unique*, the capricious and sovereign *idol*. This had grown on her quietly, like a hidden instinct developing itself; an instinct for war and conquest. During her years of marriage, a want of reprisal had perhaps created in her heart an obscure desire of paying back to mankind what she had suffered through one of them; to be in her turn the stronger, to

bend the will, to break all resistance, and in her turn cause suffering. But above all she was born a coquette, and, as soon as she felt a free existence, she began to pursue and subdue lovers as a hunter pursues his prey, simply to see it fall. Her heart, however, was not barren of emotions like those of tender and sentimental women. She did not look for the undivided love of a man, nor for happiness in passion. She wished simply to surround herself with the admiration, homages and prostrations of all ; to live in an atmosphere of tenderness. Whoever became a frequenter of her house must also become the slave of her beauty. No intellectual interest could keep her attached to those who resisted her coquetries, disdained the cares of love, or whose affections were engaged elsewhere. One had to love her to remain her friend. But, then, she was full of unimaginable cares, delicious attentions, and an infinite variety of pretty ways, that she might retain about her those whom she had captivated.

Once enlisted in her troop of admirers, she considered them hers by right of conquest. She governed them with skill according to

their weaknesses, their accomplishments, or the nature of their jealousies. They who demanded too much, she expelled at her pleasure, allowing them to return when they had grown wiser, and imposing severe conditions upon them. She amused herself so well at this game of seduction that she found as much charm in infatuating the old gallants as in turning the heads of the younger ones.

It was said that she regulated her affections according to the degree of ardor she had inspired, and big Fresnol, stupid and awkward as he was, continued to be one of her favorites, thanks to the frantic passion that she knew and felt possessed him.

She was not, however, wholly indifferent to the qualities of men; she had more than once undergone the beginning of enthusiasm, known to herself only, and checked as soon as it might have become dangerous.

Each newcomer brought a new note to her song of love and to the unknown of her nature; artists especially, in whom she discovered a refinement of coloring, a delicateness of emotion sharper and finer than in others, had several times troubled her, had

awakened in her intermittent dreams of great loves and long *liaisons*. But a prey to prudent fears, undecided, tormented, and distrustful, she had always jealously guarded herself until the moment when her last lover had ceased to move her. Moreover, she possessed the skeptic eye of the modern young girl, who can, in a few weeks, strip the greatest men of their prestige. As soon as they became infatuated with her, and, in their distress of heart, abandoned their studied attitudes and their habits of display, she saw them all alike, poor beings whom she dominated by her seductive powers.

In fact, the man whom so perfect a woman could have loved, must have possessed innumerable and inestimable qualities.

Still, she was often wearied. Having no love for society, she went there only through duty, spending those long evenings suppressing her yawns and her inclination to sleep. Interested in the world only through her aggressive caprices and varying curiosity for certain things or certain beings; attaching herself to them only enough that she might not too soon become disgusted with

what she had appreciated or admired, and not sufficiently to discover the real pleasure in an affection or in a taste; tormented by her nerves, and not by her desires; deprived of all the absorbing preoccupations of simple or ardent souls, she lived in gay weariness without even the common faith in happiness, in quest of distractions only, and already crushed by lassitude, although deeming herself satisfied.

Judging herself to be the most seductive and best gifted of women, she thought she could not be otherwise than satisfied. Vain of that charm, of which she often tried the power; in love with her irregular, odd and captivating beauty, sure of the keenness of her thought, which made her guess, feel and understand a thousand things that others did not see; proud of her wit, appreciated by so many superior men, and ignorant of the boundaries of her intellect, she believed herself to be an almost unique being, a rare pearl hatched in this mediocre world, which seemed a little empty and monotonous on account of her own superior worth.

She never suspected that she might herself

be the unknown cause of this continual weariness she suffered, but accused others, and held them responsible for her melancholy. If they did not succeed in amusing, interesting or even in loving her, it was because they were wanting in tact and real qualities. "All the world is tiresome," she would laughingly say. "The only tolerable persons are those that please me: solely because they do please me."

And they pleased her above all by acknowledging that she was incomparable. Fully aware that success is not won without trouble, she employed all her energies to entice, and found nothing so agreeable as to taste the homage of the tender look and of the heart; that violent muscle which is set beating by a single word.

The pains she had taken to conquer André Mariolle had surprised herself; for she had felt on that very first day that she pleased him. By degrees she had guessed his nature, distrustful, secretly envious, very subtle and concentrated; and to overcome his weaknesses she had shown him so much regard, preference and natural sympathy, that he had had to succumb finally.

For a month past she had felt sure of him, but, though silent, nervous and uneasy when near her, he had still resisted the avowal. Oh! those avowals. At heart she did not love them much, for, when they were too direct, too expressive, she saw herself obliged to quarrel. Twice she had even been obliged to become angry and refuse admittance to her house. What she particularly loved, were those delicate manifestations, half confidences, discreet allusions and moral prostrations; displaying rare tact and exceptional dexterity to obtain this reserve of expression in her admirers.

For a month she had awaited and watched the lips of Mariolle for that phrase, clear or veiled, according to the nature of the man, which spoke of an oppressed heartseeking relief.

He had said nothing, but had written. It was a long letter, and, as she held it in her hand, she trembled with joy. Reclining further back in her chair, and allowing her slippers to fall on the carpet, she read on. It was a surprise; for he told her, in a very clear and concise manner, that he did not intend to

suffer on her account, knowing her too well to become her victim. In very polite phrases, interspersed with compliments, through which his restrained love was transparent, he showed her that he understood her manner of treating men who were sufficiently in her toils, but that he intended to free himself from this servitude by going away. He would simply resume his former vagabond life. He would go at once.

It was an eloquent and resolute farewell.

Indeed, she was greatly surprised in reading and re-reading these four pages of tender, passionate and irritated prose. She then arose, replaced her slippers, and walked to and fro; her bare arms thrust out of her sleeves, her hands half-hidden in the pockets of her dressing-gown, with the crushed letter tightly clasped in one of them.

Still giddy from the effect of this unexpected declaration, she was musing: "This young man writes well. His letter is sincere, agitated and touching. He writes better than Lamarthe; it does not savor of romance."

She walked to the toilet table and took a cigarette from a porcelain vase; having lighted

it, she went toward the mirror, in which she saw the reflection of three young women. When quite close to it, she stopped, smiled and bowed slightly, giving a little toss of the head that said: "Very pretty, very pretty!" She inspected her eyes, showed her pretty teeth, raised her arms above her head, placed her hand on her hips, and, by inclining her head a little, turned her face so that she could see her profile in each of the three panels.

There she remained standing lovingly in front of herself, enveloped by the triple reflection of her being, which she found so charming; enraptured by the sight, seized with an egotistical and physical pleasure before her own beauty, and relishing it with a satisfaction as voluptuous as that of men.

Her maid, who had often surprised her in these daily contemplations of herself, had said, maliciously: "Madame looks at herself so often that she will soon wear out all the mirrors in the house."

But this self-love was the secret of her charm and of her power over men. By dint of admiring herself, by cultivating the arti-

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fices of face and elegance of her person; by searching for and finding all that might be of advantage to her, discovering those imperceptible shadings that rendered her charms more active and her eyes more odd and expressive, and by dint of following all the artifices which she found attractive to herself, she had naturally discovered all that could be most pleasing to others.

Had she been more beautiful and indifferent to her beauty, she would not have possessed that precipitant seduction toward love for all those who had not rebelled at the nature of her power.

Becoming somewhat tired of standing thus silent, she spoke her thought aloud, and her smiling image in the triple mirror moved its lips with hers, as she murmured: "We shall see, monsieur."

Then, crossing the room and seating herself at the writing-desk, she wrote the following:

"Dear Monsieur Mariolle, come to-morrow at four o'clock. I shall be alone, and hope to reassure you in regard to the imaginary danger that frightens you.

"I call myself your friend, and will prove that I am such.

"MICHÉLE DE BURNE."

When Andre Mariolle called next day, he found her clad in a simple lilac-gray dress as melancholy as twilight, with a plain linen collar fitting as closely around her throat as her bodice and skirt fitted around her arms, waist, and hips.

She met him with outstretched hand, but his face was grave as he kissed it and seated himself beside her. Seeing his embarrassment, she did not break the silence for a few moments. Mariolle, not knowing what to say, waited for her to speak.

“Well,” said she at last, “let us come at once to the subject which occupies our thoughts. You have written me a very insolent letter, monsieur.”

“I know it,” he replied, “and beg you will excuse it. I am, and always have been, excessively and brutally frank with everybody. I might have gone away without the misplaced and humiliating explanation I have made. But I thought it more loyal to act according to my nature, and to count on the judgment that I knew you possessed.”

“Well! well!” she said, in a tone of contented pity. “What is this folly ——”

“I prefer not to speak of it,” he interrupted. But she would not let him go on.

“I have brought you here to speak of it,” said she, “and we shall speak of it until you are convinced that you stand in no danger whatever.”

She laughed like a child, and her school-girl dress certainly gave her a very childish appearance.

“I have written you the truth, the sincere truth, the terrible truth, that I fear,” he murmured.

“I know all about it,” she added, seriously. “All my friends go through that. You also wrote that I was a terrible coquette. I admit it; but no one has died of that, neither do I believe any one has ever suffered much from it. It is what Lamarthe calls the crisis. You have come to it, but it will pass away, and you will then fall back into — how shall we say it? — into chronic love. This does not hurt, but keeps alive a little fire in all my friends, and makes them very devoted, very attached, and very faithful to me. Now, am I not also sincere, frank, and boastful? Do you know many women who would have

dared say what I have just said to you?"

She assumed an expression so amusing and decided, and at the same time so simple and defiant, that he could not help laughing in his turn.

"All your friends," said he, "are men who had often been singed, even before meeting you. Baked and hardened, they easily bear the heat of the furnace, in which you keep them continually, while I, madame, have had no such experience; and I have felt for some time past that the consequence would be terrible if I abandoned myself to the sentiment which was growing in my heart."

She suddenly became confidential. Bending slightly toward him, and crossing her hands on her lap, she said:

"Listen to me, for I am serious. It annoys me to lose a friend through what I believe to be only a chimerical fear. You may love me, I admit, but the men of the present do not love the women of to-day enough to hurt them. Believe me, I know both the one and the other."

She stopped, then added, with the singular

smile of a woman who has spoken the truth while believing it to be a lie:

“Indeed, I am not constructed for blind adoration. I am too modern ; I will be a friend, a pretty friend, for whom you entertain a sincere affection, but nothing more, for I will watch over you.”

Then, in a more serious tone, she continued :

“In any case, I warn you that I am incapable of truly loving anybody. I will treat you like the others, that is, like the more favored ones, but never better. I have a horror of despots and jealous persons ; I have had to bear everything from a husband, but from a friend, a simple friend, I will accept none of those tyrannies of affection which are the misfortune of cordial relations. You see that I am very complaisant ; I speak to you like a friend, and hide nothing from you. Now, will you make the loyal attempt I propose ? If it does not suit you, it will be still time to go, for, whatever may be the gravity of your case, remember that : ‘The absent lover is a lover cured.’”

He looked at her, already conquered by

her voice, gestures, and the intoxication of her presence. Resigned and trembling from her close contact, he murmured :

“I accept, madame, and, if I suffer, so much the worse. It is worth a little suffering to be near you.”

“Now,” said she, interrupting him, “let us never speak of it again,” and she passed on to less troublesome subjects.

An hour later he left, tortured, for he loved her, and joyful, for she had asked him to remain, and he had promised.



CHAPTER III.

HE was tortured, for he loved her. He differed from the vulgar lover to whom the idol of his heart appears in an aureole of perfections. He had become attached to her, while seeing her with the eyes of a distrustful, suspicious man, who had never yet been wholly captivated. His indolent, penetrating and uneasy spirit being always on the defensive, it had preserved him from passions. A few intrigues, two short *liaisons* that had died out from weariness, paid loves broken from disgust, and these were all in the history of his heart. He had looked on woman as being a useful object for those who wished children and a well ordered house, and perhaps as an object of relative charm for men who sought the short-lived amusements of love; but this was all.

When he had met Mme. de Burne he

was warned against her by the confidences of her friends. What he knew of her interested and perplexed him, pleased him, but repelled him somewhat. In principle he abhorred those players who never paid. After a few visits he thought her very amusing, and animated by a special and contagious charm; the natural and cultivated beauty, at once plump and slender, of her graceful person, with beautiful arms made to attract, to clasp, to entwine, and feet that might be as swift as the gazelle, yet so small as to leave no trace behind in their flight, seeming like a symbol of vain hopes. Moreover, in his relations with her he had tasted a pleasure he had believed unknown in worldly conversations. Gifted with an intelligence full of fire, whimsical and of a caressing irony, she sometimes allowed herself to be impressed by sentimental, intellectual or plastic influences, as if her mocking gayety still bore traces of the secular shadow of the poetic tendencies of her ancestors. And all this rendered her exquisite.

Desirous of conquest, she flattered him, and his visits became more and more frequent;

attracted thither by a growing need of seeing more and more of her. It was a power emanating from her that took possession of him ; an attraction of charms, of looks, of smiles, of words, although he often left her irritated by what she had said or done.

More, he felt himself invaded by that inexpressible fluid with which a woman penetrates and enslaves men. He understood and suffered through her nature, which he ardently desired so different.

Nevertheless he had been enticed and overcome in spite of himself and of his better judgment, more perhaps by what he condemned in her than by her real qualities.

That coquetry which she used openly as she would a fan, displaying or refolding it in the face of all according to the men who pleased or spoke to her ; that manner of never taking anything seriously which he had found so amusing at first, but now found threatening ; that constant desire for distractions, for something new, which was insatiable in her ever-wearied heart—all these so exasperated him at times, that, when away from her, he would resolve to lessen his visits until

the day when he might suppress them altogether.

The next day, however, he would search for a pretext to see her. What he felt above all, as he saw himself more and more overcome, was the insecurity of this love and the certainty of suffering pain.

Oh! he was not blind. Little by little he went deeper into this sentiment, like a man who drowns from fatigue because his bark has foundered and he is too far from the shore. He knew her as well as it was possible, the prescience of passion had over-excited his vision, and he could not prevent himself from continually thinking of her. With an indefatigable obstinacy he constantly sought to analyze, to discover, the unknown depths of this woman's soul, this incomprehensible mixture of gay intelligence and disenchantments, of reason and childishness, of affectionate appearances and inconstancy, all these contradictory impulses united and linked together, forming an anomalous being, both alluring and misleading.

But why did she entice him thus? he asked himself indefinitely, not understanding it, for,

with his thoughtful, observing and truly modest nature, he must logically have searched in a woman the antique and tranquil qualities of tender charms, and of constant attachment, which assures the happiness of men.

In this woman he recognized something quite unexpected ; a sort of new beginner of the human race, one of those creatures who are the commencement of a generation not at all like we have hitherto known, and who spread around them, even through their imperfections, the formidable attraction of a warning.

After the passionate and romantic dreamers of the Restoration, had come those joyous ones of the Imperial epoch, convinced of the reality of pleasures ; then, behold, appeared a new transformation of that eternal woman ; a perfected being of undecided sensibilities, of unquiet soul, agitated and irresolute, who seemed to have already passed through all the narcotics with which we either appease or excite the nerves, through the chloroform which stupefies, through the ether and morphine that lash the dreams, extinguish the senses and lull the emotions.

He tasted in her the savor of a fictitious creature accustomed to charm by her attractions. She was a rare object of luxury, attractive, exquisite and delicate, on which the gaze rested, before which the heart was agitated by desires, as tempting viands prepared and exhibited in a glass case always excite the hunger.

Having become convinced that he was descending the depths of an abyss, he began to reflect in terror at the dangers that surrounded him. What would become of him? What would she do? She would assuredly do what she had done with the others—she would bring him to that state when we follow the caprices of a woman as a dog follows the footsteps of his master, and she would classify him in her collection of more or less illustrious favorites. Had there not been one, a single one, whom she had loved; truly loved for a month, a day, an hour even, in one of those quickly repressed impulses into which her heart sometimes betrayed her?

He spoke of her incessantly with her other friends, when, after dinner, they were warmed by contact with her. He felt that they were

all still troubled, discontented, miserable, like men whom no reality had satisfied.

No; she had loved none among these paraders for public curiosity; while he, who was nothing in their midst, whose name in a crowded drawing-room caused no turning of heads nor of eyes in his direction; of what use was he to her? None, nothing but an unknown, a man who becomes the mere commonplace friend of a fashionable woman; useful, but not brilliant, like wine diluted with water.

Had he been a celebrated man, he would have accepted this rôle, which his celebrity would have rendered less humiliating; but unknown, he could not submit to it: therefore he wrote to bid her farewell.

When he received her short reply, he was moved as if from a great happiness, and, when she had made him promise to remain, he felt as if a deliverance had come to him.

A few days passed without bringing any change; but, when the calm which followed the crisis had passed away, he felt his desire for her growing and burning within him. He had resolved to never again speak of his love

to her, but he had not promised to abstain from writing. So one night, being unable to sleep in this tormented state of incessant love, his thoughts ever recurring to her, he seated himself at his desk, almost in spite of his reasoning, and began to express in writing the feelings that agitated him. It was not a letter: it was a series of notes, phrases, thoughts, and paroxysms of sufferings expressed in words.

This calmed him, relieving him somewhat of the agony that tortured him, and he soon fell asleep.

As soon as he awakened the next morning, he reread those pages, and, finding them very touching, placed them in an envelope, addressed and sealed it. He would not post it until late, that she might receive it on awakening the next morning.

He felt assured that she would not be frightened by a few sheets of paper. The most timid of women show great indulgence toward a letter that speaks of sincere love. And these letters, when written by a trembling hand, overflowing eyes and distracted features, have in turn an invincible power over their hearts.

Toward evening he went to her house, wondering how she had received it, and what she would say to him. He found M. de Pradon smoking a cigarette and chatting with his daughter. He often spent hours in this manner, and always treated her more as an admirer than as a father. There was in their relations and affections that shade of homage which she rendered herself, and exacted from others.

Her face lighted up with a gleam of pleasure as she saw Mariolle enter, and she extended her hand with a smile that said: "I am pleased with you."

Mariolle hoped they would soon be alone. But M. de Pradon did not move. Although he had long since ceased to be troubled about his daughter, knowing her character and strength of mind, he nevertheless watched over her with a curious and somewhat marital anxiety. He wished to learn what chance of permanent success this new friend might have. Would he become a simple bird of passage — like all the others? or only a member of the ordinary circle?

Consequently he remained, and Mariolle,

seeing he could not dislodge him, decided on his course of action. He would try and win favor with him, considering a friendly interest or even a neutral footing better than open hostility. He therefore exerted himself to be gay and amusing, carefully refraining from appearing as a suitor.

Mme. de Burne smiled contentedly, thinking: "He is not so stupid, and he is really a skillful comedian;" while M. de Bradon was saying to himself: "He is an agreeable man, of whom my daughter cannot make a fool, as she did of those idiots." And when Mariolle arose to go, he left them both charmed by his visit.

But he came away with despair in his heart, understanding full well the thralldom in which she held him, and feeling that he was knocking in vain at this heart; like a prisoner striking his fist on the iron door.

He was aware of his bondage, but no longer tried to free himself from it. As he could not evade this fatality, he decided to have recourse to artifice; he would be patient, tenacious, and dissimulate; he would conquer her by skill, by that homage for which she

thirsted, by that adoration which intoxicated her, by that voluntary servitude which he would assume.

Evidently his letter had pleased her. He would write again. He did write. Nearly every evening on his return home, at that hour when the mind, animated by all the agitations of the day, looks upon what interests or moves it, in a sort of hallucination, he would seat himself at the table and exalt himself by thinking of her. The germ of poetry that so many indolent men allow to be dead within them, was awakened in his soul by this enthusiasm. By dint of writing the same things or rather the same thing, his love, under forms that renewed the daily repetition of his desires, he fired his ardor in this occupation of tender literature. During the entire day he sought and found for her those irresistible expressions of passionate emotion that escape like sparks from the brain. Thus he fanned the flame that burned in his heart, for truly passionate love letters are more dangerous to the writer than to the one who receives them. By keeping himself in this state of effervescence, by firing his blood and

filling his soul with one single thought, he lost by degrees, the notion of the reality of this woman. No longer judging her as he had known her formerly, he now only saw her through the melody of his phrases, and all he wrote each night became to him so many realities. This daily work of idealization clothed her with all the charms he had dreamed. His former resistances fell before the undeniable affection shown him by Mme. de Burne. Indeed, at this moment, although nothing had been said, she preferred him to all others, and showed it openly to him. And he believed, with a sort of madness born of hope, that she would yet come to love him.

In truth, she was succumbing with a complicated and ingenuous joy, to the seduction of his letters. No one had ever adulated and cherished her in this manner, with so much reserve. No one had ever had that charming idea of having this breakfast of sentiment brought on a silver salver to her bed each morning by her maid, and what was most precious of all, was, that he never spoke of it, appearing to ignore it. He was the coldest among the friends in her drawing-room,

never even alluding to the shower of tenderness with which he covered her in secret.

She had received many love-letters before, but in an entirely different tone, less reserved, more pressing, savoring more of the nature of a command.

During three months, his three months of crisis, Lamarthe had consecrated to her the pretty correspondence of a passionate novelist who dabbles in literature. In a special drawer of her secretary she had these graceful and seductive epistles, penned to a woman by a truly affectionate writer, who had caressed her with his pen until the day when he had given up all hope of success.

Mariolle's letters were different. They were of a concentration of desire so energetic, of a sincerity of expression so true, of a submission so complete, of a devotion that promised to be so durable, that she received, opened, and tasted them with a pleasure such as no writing had ever given her.

This increased her affection for him. She invited him to come more frequently, especially as he preserved this absolute discretion in their relations, seeming to forget, while

speaking to her, that he had ever made use of a sheet of paper to tell her of his adoration. Moreover, she considered the situation original, worthy of a novel, and found, in her profound satisfaction at being near this being who loved her thus, a sort of fervent active sympathy through which she appreciated him in a particular manner.

Until now, in all the hearts that she had troubled, she had encountered, in spite of the vanity of her coquetry, other and outside preoccupations. She did not reign alone, she found and saw other powerful motives which did not concern her. Jealous of music with Massival, of literature with Lamarthe, there always had existed something to divide her sway in the souls of ambitious men, of men of renown, or of artists, for whom their profession is a mistress from which no thing or person can detach them, she now met, for the first time, one to whom she was everything. Assuredly big Fresnol loved her as much, but, then, he was only big Fresnol. She had never dominated over any one in this manner, and her egotistical gratitude to the man who gave her this triumph showed signs of tenderness.

She had need of him henceforth, need of his presence, his regard, his servitude, his domesticated love. If he flattered her vanity less than others, he flattered more those sovereign exigencies that govern the soul and body of coquettes ; her pride and her instincts of domination, those ferocious instincts of the calm woman.

Like a country of which we take possession, she, little by little, engrossed his life by a succession of little invasions, more and more numerous each day. She organized fêtes, theater parties, restaurant dinners, and dragged him behind her with the satisfaction of a conqueror, being unable to do without him, or perhaps without the slavery to which she had reduced him.

He followed her, happy to feel himself thus cherished, caressed, by her eyes, her voice, and her caprices ; he lived in a transport of loving desire that excited and burned him like a violent fever.

END OF PART FIRST.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE sound of wheels at the door made Mariolle's heart beat violently with the hope that Mme. de Burne had at last returned, and, when he heard hurrying footsteps toward the apartment, he no longer doubted it.

Early that morning he had received a message bidding him come to her at once, and, although he had hastened to obey the summons, she had already gone out for her daily drive when he reached the house.

He was now waiting in that drawing-room where he so loved to be, where everything possessed a charm for him; but now, as he found himself alone, an oppression of the heart, a nervousness, seized him, through the

fear that some unforeseen obstacle might prevent her return, and delay their interview until the next day.

She came into the room, still wearing her hat, and looking flushed and pleased.

"I have news for you, monsieur!" she exclaimed, as she entered.

"Indeed, madame!"

"Yes," continued she, laughing; "I am going to spend a few weeks in the country."

"You seem pleased to go," he said, in a voice that betrayed the anguish her sudden announcement had caused in his heart.

"Yes; let us sit down, and I will tell you all about it," she answered. "You know, or rather you do not know, that my uncle, M. Valsaci, has a country house at Avranches, where he spends the greater part of his life with his wife and children, being inspector-in-chief of bridges in that district. We have always spent a part of each summer with them, but this year I had no wish to go. He insisted, however, and even became angry. Papa, who is terribly jealous, and declares that I am compromising myself with you, also insists that we should go, and go at once.

He says you come here too often. But never mind, I will arrange that."

"Well, then, as I was saying before, papa scolded me, and made me promise to go to Avranches for a time. We leave Tuesday morning. What do you think of it?"

"I am quite overcome," he replied.

"Is that all?" said she, reproachfully.

"What can I do? I certainly cannot prevent you from going."

"Can you not think of some plan?"

"Why — no — I can think of none. Can you?"

"I have an idea, and it is this. Avranches is not far from Mont-Saint-Michel. Have you seen Mont-Saint-Michel?"

"No, madame, I have not."

"Well, next Friday you must suddenly become inspired with the desire to see that wonderful place. On your way there you will stop at Avranches, and on Saturday evening, let us say at sunset, you will take a stroll in the public garden overlooking the bay. We shall meet there by chance. Papa will make a scene of course, but that does not matter."

“I shall organize a party including the whole family, to visit the abbey next day. You must show a great deal of enthusiasm, and be as charming as you know how to be when you wish it. Ingratiate yourself with my aunt, and invite us all to dine with you at the hotel near the abbey, where we shall also spend the night. Next day we will part; you will return by St. Malo, and a week later I shall be back in Paris. Is it not well imagined and planned? And am I not amiable and kind to you?”

“You are all that I love best in the world,” he murmured, in a burst of gratitude.

“Nonsense!” exclaimed she.

Their eyes met for an instant. She smiled, and in that smile she conveyed her gratitude for his devotion, and a lively, sincere sympathy, almost akin to love. He contemplated her with devouring eyes; he wanted to throw himself at her feet, to kiss the hem of her dress, to cry out something that she might understand what he could not express in words, to let her see his love; his terrible and delicious love, which filled his heart and

soul with such unutterable pain, because he could not show it.

But as the marksman guesses that his bullet has made a hole through the black speck in the target, so she guessed all that was in his heart. He was filled with thoughts of her, of her only. She possessed him more entirely than she possessed herself, and she found him charming and was happy.

“Then, it is understood,” said she, gayly.

“Yes, madame ; it is understood,” he murmured, in a voice choked with emotion.

After a short silence she resumed, abruptly :

“You must leave me now. I hurried back solely to tell you this. I have still four or five places to visit before dinner, and, as I go day after to-morrow, I shall be busy until my departure.”

He arose at once, overwhelmed with pain, he, whose only wish was to be always near her, and, having kissed her hand, he withdrew, heartsore but hopeful.

The next four days passed very slowly for him. He dragged through their weary length without seeing any one in Paris, preferring

silence and solitude to the company of his friends.

He took the eight o'clock express Friday morning. He had slept but little on the previous night, as the near approach of the hour of departure rendered him feverish and uneasy. His dark, silent chamber, in which he heard nothing but the noise of passing vehicles, oppressed him like a prison during the night.

As the first faint streaks of the gray and misty dawn streamed in through the closed curtains, he jumped from his bed, opened the window and looked at the sky. He had been haunted by the fear of bad weather, but the sky was calm and beautiful, and a slight mist presaged a warm day. He dressed hurriedly, and was ready two hours too soon. He was impatient to leave the house, to be on his way, and he dispatched his servant for a fiacre before he was half dressed through fear of not finding any.

The first jolts of the vehicle were for him so many shocks of happiness ; but, when he reached the station, and found that he had still fifty minutes to wait for the departure of the train, his nervousness returned.

He found an empty compartment, and, having engaged the whole of it, gave himself up to his dreams. When he felt himself in motion, gliding toward her, carried away by the swift, rapid movement of the express, his ardor redoubled, and he found himself possessed by the foolish desire of pushing with his two hands against the partition of the compartment to increase its speed.

He remained in this helpless and tormented mood until the middle of the day; but, when they had finally passed Argentin, his eyes were attracted by the beauty of the Norman scenery.

They were traversing a long, undulating country, interspersed with small valleys, where the cottages of the peasants, the green fields and beautiful orchards, were surrounded by tall trees, whose leaves glistened under the rays of the sun. It was near the last days of July, during that vigorous season in which earth, that powerful nurse, gives forth its sap and its life. These orchards, dotted here and there with cattle, separated and linked by high, leafy walls, succeeded each other in-

definitely through this fresh country, whose soil seemed to sweat cider and flesh.

Amid the tall poplars, almost hidden under the overhanging willows, glided innumerable narrow rivers—small streams that sparkled through the trees for a moment, then disappeared only to appear further on, bathing the whole country with a luxuriant fertility.

This rapid and continuous defile of beautiful country enchanted him, and distracted his thoughts for a few hours.

But when he had changed cars at Folligny his impatience returned with renewed violence, and during the last forty minutes of the journey he looked at his watch at least twenty times. He eagerly watched their progress through the country, and was at last greeted by the sight of the rising ground on which stood the town where she awaited him. The train had been delayed, and one hour only separated him from the moment he was to meet her, by chance, in the public garden.

He was the only passenger in the hotel omnibus, and they were soon slowly ascending the steep road leading to the top of an eminence which was crowned by houses, giv-

ing it the appearance of a fortified place from a distance. Avranches was an old and pretty town of Normandy, with small dwellings, closely resembling each other, and grouped regularly and with precision, giving the place an air of ancient pride and modest ease.

As soon as Mariolle reached the hotel he threw his traveling-bag into his room and inquired the way to the botanical garden. Although it was still early, he lost no time, but hurried on in the hope that she might already be there.

When he reached the gate he saw that the garden was empty, or nearly so. Three old men were walking about indolently, leisurely taking their evening stroll, and a family of English children, boys and girls, were playing around their governess.

With a beating heart he walked on, carefully scrutinizing the paths he crossed. At last he emerged in a broad path which cut the garden in two, and which was fringed on each side by dark green elms, whose foliage formed an arch in the center; he then followed this path for a short distance, and, as he reached a terrace looking toward the horizon, all thoughts

of her who had brought him here, were suddenly driven from him by the sight that met his eyes.

At the foot of the eminence on which he stood, was a vast sandy plain that stretched far away and mingled in the distance with the sea and the sky.

A river ran through this sandy desert, and the numerous puddles of dead water left by the receding tide were glistening under the rays of the flaming sun, and dotting it with luminous patches that seemed like open spaces on another interior sky.

In the center of this yellow plain, and about twelve or fifteen kilometers from the shore, arose a fantastic pyramid, or monumental profile of pointed rocks, crowned by a cathedral.

It had for a neighbor on these immense downs only a dry rock, round backed, and crouching on the moving sands, the "Tombe-laine."

Further off in the faint outline of the moving currents, partly submerged rocks showed their brown crests; and the eye, continuing the circle of the horizon toward the right,

descried the vast green stretch of Norman country, so covered by trees that it had the appearance of an unlimited forest in contrast with this sandy solitude. It was the whole of nature offering itself in one glance, in one site, in its grandeur, in its power, in its freshness and in all its grace; and the eye went from this vision of forest to the apparition of that mountain of granite, the solitary inhabitant of the sands which stood forth, a strange Gothic figure, on this immense beach.

Mariolle was a lover of nature, and in his younger days he had often trembled before the surprises which unknown lands reveal to the traveler; he was now so enraptured that he stood motionless, so moved, so softened in spirit, as to almost forget his lacerated heart. But the sound of a vibrating bell recalled him to the sense of his sufferings and his longing to meet her. The garden was still almost deserted, the English children had disappeared, and the three old men only remained, still continuing their monotonous walk. He was restless, and began to imitate them.

He was sure she would soon come; in a few moments, perhaps, he would see her at the end

of one of those paths that terminated at this marvelous terrace. He would recognize her figure, her gait, then her features and her smile, and then he would hear her voice. What happiness ! Oh ! what happiness ! He felt her near presence somewhere, as yet invisible, undiscoverable, but thinking of him also, knowing they would soon meet again.

At this moment he almost cried out. A blue parasol, only the top of a blue parasol gliding along the wall; it was hers without doubt. A little boy rolling a hoop in front of him appeared, then two ladies—he recognized her—then two men, her father and another gentleman. She was dressed entirely in blue, like a springsky. Oh, yes, he recognized her before he even saw her face, but he dared not go to her, feeling that he would certainly stammer and blush, and be unable to find words to explain this chance meeting to the suspicious eyes of M. de Pradon.

He, nevertheless, walked in their direction, with a far-away look in his eyes, lost in the contemplation of the distant sea. She soon caught sight of him, however, and called out,

without even taking the trouble of affecting surprise:

“Good-day, Monsieur Mariolle. It is very beautiful, is it not?”

Astounded by this mode of proceeding, he scarcely knew what to say, but managed at last to stammer, “Ah! it is you, madame. How fortunate I am to meet you here. I am admiring this delicious country.”

“And you have chosen the time when I am here,” she rejoined, smiling; “how very amiable on your part.”

She then presented him to her companions. “One of my best friends, Monsieur Mariolle; my aunt, Mme. Valasci; my uncle, who makes bridges.”

After the first greetings were exchanged, M. de Pradon and the young man shook hands coldly, and they then resumed their walk.

She had placed him between herself and her aunt, at the same time giving him a rapid glance, warning him to be on his guard.

“What do you think of the country?” she asked, after a short silence.

“I have never seen anything so beautiful,” he replied.

“Ah! had you spent a few days here, as I have done, you would feel how it enraptures one. Indeed, it possesses an inexpressible charm. These regular traces, left by the sea on the sands, this grand, never-ceasing movement, bathing this vast plain twice a day, and which rolls in so rapidly that a race-horse could not fly fast enough to escape it — this extraordinary spectacle, given us by heaven, so carries me away that I scarcely know myself. Is it not true, aunt?”

Mme. Valsaci, a gray-haired old lady, highly respected in the province as the wife of the esteemed chief engineer, declared that she had never seen her niece in such a state of enthusiasm, and added, after a few moments of reflection:

“It is not surprising, when one has hardly ever seen or admired anything but the decorations of theaters.”

“But I go to Trouville or to Dieppe almost every season,” protested her niece.

“We go to Dieppe or Trouville to meet friends. The sea there is merely a bathing place for lovers,” added the old lady, laughing, and evidently without malice.

They turned, and went back slowly in the direction of the terrace. This place seemed to possess an irresistible attraction, for the promenaders always returned to it from all parts of the garden, like balls rolling down a declivity. The setting sun spread a haze of yellow gold, light and transparent, behind the tall outlines of the abbey, which became more and more clouded, like a gigantic chair under a glittering veil. But all this was unheeded by Mariolle; he saw only the adorable figure at his side enveloped in a cloud of blue. Never had he thought her half as delicious. She was changed, yet he could not define in what the change consisted. The freshness of this country, of this sky, and this verdure, seemed to have imparted itself to her being, to be reflected in her eyes, and in her hair, and even to have penetrated her soul. Never had he known and loved her thus.

He walked on in silence at her side; the rustle of her dress, the occasional touch of her arm, and the expression of their eyes as they met, overcame him as completely as if they had killed his personality within him. He felt himself suddenly destroyed by the

contact of this woman, absorbed by her until he no longer was anything; nothing but a desire, nothing but an appeal, nothing but an adoration. She had suppressed all his former being as effectually as we destroy a letter by flame.

She saw and understood her absolute victory, and it touched her more keenly in this atmosphere of the sea filled with brilliancy and life.

“I am so glad to see you,” she murmured, without looking up, then added, aloud:

“How long do you remain here?”

“I shall remain two days; that is, counting to-day as one,” he replied, and then, turning to her aunt, said:

“Will Mme. Valsaci honor me by spending the day to-morrow at Mont-Saint-Michel, accompanied by her husband?”

Mme. de Burne hurriedly interposed.

“I will not allow her to refuse, since we have been so fortunate as to meet you here.”

“I will consent with pleasure, on condition that you dine with us this evening,” replied the old lady.

As he bowed his acceptance he felt a sud-

den rapture, such as seizes us when we receive the news we have long hoped for. What had he obtained? What novelty had happened in his life? Nothing; and yet he felt himself filled with the intoxication of an undefinable presentiment.

They walked on the terrace for a long time awaiting the sunset to enjoy the spectacle of the dark shadow of the Mont clearly defined against the illuminated horizon.

They conversed on simple subjects, repeating all that may be said before a stranger, and contenting themselves with expressive looks whenever their eyes met.

They then went to the villa, which was situated on the outskirts of Avranches, in the midst of a pretty garden overlooking the bay.

Wishing to be discreet, and troubled, moreover, by the cold, almost hostile manner of M. de Pradon, Mariolle left the villa soon after dinner.

As he touched her hand with his lips, Mme. de Burne repeated twice, in a low voice: "To-morrow, to-morrow."

As soon as he had gone M. and Mme. Valsaci, true to their provincial habits, pro-

posed retiring for the night. Mme. de Burne having announced her intention of walking in the garden before retiring, her father offered to accompany her.

She threw a shawl over her shoulders, and they walked side by side on the wide sandy paths of the garden, which the full moon lighted up like so many sinuous rivers, through the thick foliage of the trees.

After a somewhat long silence, M. de Pradon said, in a low voice:

“My dear child, you will do me the justice to admit that I have never troubled you with advice.”

She felt that a storm was coming, and was already prepared for it.

“I beg your pardon, papa,” said she, “you have already given me one at least.”

“I!” he exclaimed.

“Yes, you,” she answered.

“An advice relative —— to your happiness?” he added.

“Yes, and moreover a very bad one. Therefore I have decided, that, if you give me any more, I shall not follow it.”

“What advice have I given you?” he asked.

“ You advised me to marry M. de Burne, which proves that you are wanting in judgment, in penetration, in the knowledge of mankind in general, and of your daughter in particular.”

He was silent for a few moments, through surprise and embarrassment; then he continued, slowly:

“ Yes, I admit I was mistaken in that. But I am sure that I cannot be mistaken in the paternal advice that I owe you to-day.”

“ Go on,” said she; “ I will give it the consideration it deserves.”

“ You are on the point of compromising yourself,” said he.

“ With M. Mariolle, undoubtedly ? ” she asked, with a forced laugh.

“ Yes, with M. Mariolle,” he assented.

“ You forget,” rejoined she, “ that I have already compromised myself with M. George de Maltry, with M. Massival, with M. Gaston de Lamarthe, and a dozen others of whom you have been jealous, for a man cannot be attentive and devoted to me without my whole troupe becoming furious, with you, whom na-

ture has given me as a father and guardian, at their head."

"No, no," he interrupted quickly; "I do not mean that you have ever compromised yourself with any one; on the contrary, you displayed a great deal of tact and dignity in your relations with your friends."

She interrupted him almost angrily.

"My dear papa, I am no longer a child, and I assure you that I will not compromise myself with M. Mariolle any more than I have with the others; do not fear. However, I admit that I invited him to meet me here. I find him charming, intelligent, and much less selfish than the others. This was your own opinion also, until you thought you had discovered my preference for him. Oh! you are not as sharp-witted as you think! I know you well also, and could say a great deal if I wished. But to return to the subject: M. Mariolle pleases me, and I thought that an excursion with him would be a very enjoyable affair, and it would be very stupid to deprive myself of any amusement when there is no danger; and there will be no danger of compromising myself, since you will be there."

She was laughing gayly now, knowing well that each word struck home. His long suspected jealousy was now a certainty. This discovery gave her the advantage over him, and flattered her insatiable vanity.

He was silent, embarrassed and irritated, feeling also that she had guessed that his paternal solicitude sprung from a mysterious jealousy, which he was unwilling to acknowledge even to himself.

“Do not be alarmed,” she added. “It is the most natural thing in the world to make an excursion to Mont-Saint-Michel at this season of the year, accompanied by my uncle, my aunt, my father, and a friend. It will not be known, moreover; and, even if it should become known, no one can find fault. When we have returned to Paris I shall install this friend in the ranks with the others.”

“Very well,” he replied; “let us forget that I have spoken;” and a few minutes later he added:

“Let us return to the house; I am tired, and will go to bed.”

“I shall remain here a little longer,” she replied, “the night is so beautiful.”

“Do not remain too late,” he said, intentionally. “One never knows whom they may meet.”

“I shall not leave the garden,” she replied.

“Good night, then, my dear child,” said he, kissing her lightly on the forehead.

She seated herself on a little rustic bench, sheltered by a large oak tree. The night was warm, filled with the odors of the fields and of the sea; and the full moon was partly obscured by the misty vapors that veiled the bay and hid the downs which the rising tide had already covered.

Michèle de Burne, her hands crossed on her lap, her eyes fixed on the distance, tried to look into her soul, through a mist as impenetrable as that over the sands.

How many times, when seated before her mirror in her dressing-room in Paris, she had already asked herself: “What do I love? What do I desire? What do I hope for? and What am I?”

Besides the pleasure of being beautiful, and that profound desire of pleasing every one, which she really greatly enjoyed, she had never felt in her heart anything but quickly

extinguished curiosities. Moreover, she was not ignorant of her own character, having become too much habituated to study her face and all her person, to not also examine her heart. Until now she had taken but a vague interest in all that moved those who were powerless to inspire her love, and who, at the most, only amused her.

Nevertheless, each time she had felt within her the beginning of an attraction for any one ; each time a rival had contended with her the affections of the man whom she wished to conquer, and had moved her feminine instincts, or had caused the fever of love to burn in her veins, she had found, in these futile attempts at loving, an emotion much more ardent than the mere pleasure of success. But this was not lasting, and why? Because she tired of it, became disgusted, and perhaps, because she understood the object too clearly. Everything that at first pleased her in a man, all that animated, agitated or moved her, soon became insipid and commonplace. They all resembled each other without being quite similar; and none had yet appeared gifted with the nature and

qualities necessary to awaken love in her heart.

And why was this? Was the fault theirs or her own? Were they wanting in what she expected? or did she lack the qualities necessary to love? Do we love because we meet a being whom we think was truly created for us? or is it simply because we are born with the faculty of loving? It sometimes seemed to her that the hearts of others possessed arms, like the body; loving and outstretched arms, that attracted and entwined, and that her own was armless, having nothing but the eyes.

Superior men often become enamored of women who are unworthy of them; without intelligence or accomplishments, sometimes even without beauty. Why and how? What a mystery! This crisis, then, is not due merely to a providential meeting, but to a sort of germ we carry within us, and which grows or comes to life suddenly.

She had often listened to confidences, she had surprised secrets, and had even seen with her own eyes the sudden transfiguration

caused by that intoxication of the soul, and she had often thought of it all.

In the world, amid the bustle of visits, amusements and all the little stupidities that interest us through sheer idleness, she had sometimes discovered, with an envious surprise, and almost with incredulity, that there existed beings, men and women, in whom something extraordinary had undoubtedly taken place. They did not show it in a noisy manner, but, with her delicate perception, she guessed and felt it. In their smiles, and more especially in their eyes, was reflected something inexpressible, something of delicious happiness. It was a joy of the soul, impregnating the body, and illuminating their being.

And, without knowing why, she had envied them. Lovers had always vexed her, and that profound irritation inspired in her by those whose hearts beat with passion, she had invariably qualified as disgust. She believed that she recognized them with an exceptional surety of penetration, and with promptitude; and in fact she had often discovered and unveiled *liaisons* long before the world had even suspected them.

When she thought of all this, of the tender folly into which we may be thrown by the neighboring existence of another being ; by the sight, the voice, the thought, the I know not what of the beloved person for whom our heart has become distractedly troubled, she could not believe herself capable of such a thing. Yet how often, when weary of everything, and dreaming of inexpressible desires, tormented by that harassing yearning for change, and for the unknown which was perhaps but the obscure agitation of an indefinite search for affection, she had wished, with a secret shame, born of her pride, to meet a man, who for a time, for a few months, might draw her into that ever-encircling forgetfulness of all thought, and with all her soul ; for life in these cases of emotion must assume a strange attraction of ecstasy and intoxication.

She had not merely wished for this meeting, but had even searched a little, a very little for it, with that indolent activity that never stopped long at anything.

In all these commencements of attraction toward qualified superior men which had daz-

zled for a few weeks at a time, her short effervescence of heart had always died out in irremediable deceptions.

She exacted too much from their worth, from their nature, their character, their delicacy and their qualities. With each, she had always been reduced to admit that the faults of eminent men are often more salient than their merits ; that talent is a special gift, like good sight or a good stomach ; a gift of the work-shop, an isolated gift, without reference to the whole of those personal qualities that render friendly relations cordial or seductive.

But since she had met Mariolle she had been attracted to him by something different. Did she love him, however? Did she love him with passion? Without prestige, without notoriety, he had conquered her by his affection, by his tenderness, by his intelligence, by all the simple and veritable attractions of his person. He had conquered her, for she thought of him incessantly, she continually desired his presence ; no other being in the world was more agreeable, more sympathetic and more indispensable to her. Was this love?



She did not feel that fire in her heart of which she had heard, but she felt, for the first time, a sincere desire to be something more than a charming friend to this man. Did she love him? To love, must the object appear endowed with exceptional attractions, different, and, above all things, in that aureole the heart creates around its favored one? or does it suffice that he should please you, please you to that point that you cannot live without him?

In that case she loved him, or, at least, she almost loved him; and, after long and deep reflection, she at last answered her own thoughts: "Yes, I love him; but I lack enthusiasm: my nature is to blame."

And yet, it was enthusiasm she had felt a few hours ago, when she saw him coming toward her on that terrace in the public garden. For the first time she had felt that inexpressible something that carries, pushes, throws us toward some one. She had experienced a deep pleasure in walking beside him, in having him near, burning with love for her; when they had watched the setting sun behind the shadow of Mont-

Saint-Michel, it was like a vision in a legend. Was not love itself a sort of legend of the soul, in which some instinctively believe, while others, by dint of thinking of it, end by believing sometimes also? Would she also become a believer? She had felt an odd desire to lean her head on his shoulder, to be nearer to him ; to search for that "nearness" which we never find, to give him that which we offer in vain, and which we always keep—the secret intimacy of self.

Yes, she had felt some rapture toward him, and she still felt it at this moment at the bottom of her heart. Perhaps it would suffice to abandon herself to this rapture to have it become love. She resisted and reasoned too much; she struggled too much against the charms of others. Would it not be delicious, on such a night, to walk at his side under the willows along the river, and to repay his love by offering him her lips from time to time?

The noise of an opening window attracted her attention at this point, and, looking up, she saw that her father was searching for her.

"Have you not gone to bed yet?" she cried out to him.

“No; I was uneasy. If you do not come in you will take cold,” he replied.

She arose, and entered the house. When she reached her room, she raised the curtain to look at the vapors on the bay, which appeared even whiter in the bright moonlight, and it seemed to her that the vapors of her heart were becoming more transparent under this rise of tenderness.

She slept soundly, nevertheless, and did not open her eyes until her maid knocked at her door to awaken her; for they were to breakfast at the Mont.

When she heard the noise of the carriage which came for them, she leaned from the window, and her eyes suddenly met those of André Mariolle, who was looking for her. Her heart began to beat a little. She felt, with surprise and emotion, the strange and new impression of that muscle which palpitates and sends forth a rush of blood to the temples at the sight of a certain being. She repeated to herself what she had said the previous night: “I shall love him !”

And when they met, knowing him to be tormented, sick with love, she almost wanted

to open her arms and offer him her lips, but she merely exchanged a glance with him, that made him pale with happiness.

It was a clear summer morning, filled with the songs of birds and expanded life. They descended the hill, crossed the river and passed through the village by a road so rocky that the party was severely jolted in the carriage. After a long silence Mme. de Burne began to chaff her uncle about the state of the road ; this sufficed to break the ice, and the gayety that floated in the air soon penetrated their spirits.

Suddenly at a turn of the road the bay reappeared, not yellow, as it had appeared on the previous evening, but sparkling with clear water that covered everything, the sands, the salt marshes, and even the road itself a little further on.

For an hour they went on very slowly, waiting for the tide to recede that they might proceed.

The belt of elms and oaks encircling the farms which they were passing, permitted only occasional glimpses of the immense profile of the abbey on its rocky base, now in mid-

ocean. Then, suddenly, it showed itself nearer and nearer, more and more surprising, the sun lighting up with its reddish tints that immense granite church on its rocky foundation.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle contemplated it, and, when their eyes met, there was mingled with their sharp and rising trouble, the poetry of this apparition on this rosy July morning.

They all conversed freely together ; Mme. Valsaci told tragic stories of disasters, of nocturnal dramas, in which the moving sands half swallowed the travelers. M. Valsaci defended the dike, which had been attacked by artists ; pointing out the advantages obtained from an uninterrupted communication with the Mont ; he also spoke of the immense downs recovered from the sea, used now for pasture, but which, in time, would be fit for cultivation.

The carriage was suddenly brought to a standstill as the sea still inundated the road. It was but a light sheet of water, merely enough to hide the road ; but they feared to

sink in the quagmire, and were forced to wait.

“ Oh ! the tide goes down very fast,” said M. Valsaci, pointing to the road where the thin layer of water was rapidly disappearing, apparently absorbed by the earth or attracted from afar by a mysterious and powerful force.

They alighted, that they might watch more closely this strange departure of the sea; so rapid and silent in its flight. Green patches of submerged verdure already appeared here and there, and these grew in dimension, becoming islands. These islands in turn soon assumed the appearance of continents, separated by miniature oceans, and at last the entire surface of the gulf became a retreating ground for the ocean, returning to the distance.

It might be called a long silver veil, an immense veil, torn and filled with holes in many places, and leaving behind it naked prairies of long grass without showing the sands that followed them.

They had again entered the carriage, and were standing to obtain a better view of what

was going on around them. Although the road was drying fast, the horses went on but slowly. Notwithstanding this precaution the roughness of the road often caused them to lose their equilibrium, and suddenly André Mariolle felt Mme. de Burne's shoulder brushing against his own. At first he supposed that a sudden jolt had caused this contact, but she did not attempt to change her position, and each movement of the wheels caused her to lean more and more heavily against him. His trepidation and infatuation made him tremble; he dared not look at the young woman, the happiness of this un hoped-for familiarity paralyzing him, and he was thinking, in a disorder of ideas like that of intoxication, "Is it possible?" "Can it be possible? Are we both losing our senses?"

The speed of the vehicle was now increased, so they seated themselves once more. Suddenly Mariolle experienced the imperious and mysterious desire of making himself agreeable to M. de Pradon, and he showered flattering attentions upon him. The old man was as susceptible to flattery and compliments

as his daughter, so he soon forgot his ill-humor, and smiled pleasantly.

They now reached the dike, and went straight on in the direction of the Mont, which stood erect amid the sands at the end of this road. At the left, the slope was bathed by the river Pontorson; to the right, the pasture lands, covered with grass, had given place to the still, dank downs, impregnated by the sea.

The high monument appeared to grow larger against the blue sky, as it now stood clearly outlined in all its details, its bell-shaped and turreted head covered by grinning gargoyles, and heads of monsters, with which the terrified faith of our fathers surmounted their Gothic sanctuaries.

It was nearly one o'clock when they reached the hotel, where the breakfast had been ordered; but the inn-keeper, from motives of prudence, was not quite ready. They were, consequently, very hungry and tired when at last they seated themselves at the table; but the champagne soon enlivened them, and two hearts, at least, believed themselves very near happiness. By the time the dessert was

brought on, the wine had developed in the hearts of all that agreeable sensation of comfort which disposes us to approve and accept everything that may be proposed. Mariolle took advantage of this good humor by proposing that they should all remain there until the next day, adding:

“ It will be so beautiful to see all this in the moonlight; and, besides, we will have the pleasure of dining together again this evening.”

Mme. de Burne and the two gentlemen accepted the invitation at once; Mme. Valsaci alone hesitated, on account of her boy, whom she had left at home; but her husband reassured her, reminding her that she had often absented herself from home, and, besides, he immediately sent a dispatch to the governess, notifying her of their intention. He was charmed with Mariolle, who had flattered him by approving the dike, saying it really did not spoil the view of the Mont, as had often been said.

Soon after breakfast they started to visit the Mont, taking the road by the ramparts. The houses skirting the road were built in the style of the middle ages, and grouped

one over the other on this immense block of granite, with the abbey on its summit. The town is divided from the sea by a high, embattled wall encircling the town, full of nooks, angles, platforms, and loopholes, as astonishing to the eye as the discovery at every open space of a new expanse of immense horizon. They proceeded in silence for a while, awed by the grandeur of their surroundings. At each turn of the road they obtained a new view of the immense edifice; and above them, against the sky, there appeared a prodigious mixture of arrows, granite flowers, and arches, thrown from one tower to another; an intricate, enormous, and delicate interlacing of architecture against the azure of the sky, from which it extended, and seemed to swallow up the fantastic gargoyles with their heads of monsters. Between the sea and the abbey, on the north flank of the Mont, was a steep declivity, called the forest, because it was covered with old trees. It extended from the last of the houses, making a somber green patch on the yellow sands.

Mme. de Burne and André Mariolle, who were some distance ahead of the others,

stopped to admire the vivid colorings. She was leaning on his arm, benumbed by a rapture she had never before experienced. She could have wished this rough road to be endless, for she felt herself almost fully satisfied for the first time in her life.

“Oh! how beautiful it is,” she murmured.

“I can think of nothing but you,” he replied, looking at her.

She smiled, and continued:

“I am not very poetic, but nevertheless I find this so beautiful that I feel truly moved.”

They had now arrived at the gate of the abbey, and they entered by that superb stairway, between two enormous towers, which lead to the guards' quarters. They then went from room to room, from court to court, from dungeon to dungeon, listening to the guide's descriptions, and astonished and enchanted with everything. A crypt of massive pillars supported the grand edifice. This marvel was a three-storied Gothic monument, and the most extraordinary masterpiece of monastic and military architecture of the middle ages.

When they reached the cloister, they were

astonished by the sight of the large square space inclosed within the most superb and most graceful colonnades of all the cloisters in the world. Along the four galleries was an uninterrupted wreath of ornaments and an infinite variety of Gothic flowers, of that elegant and simple design of the old masters, whose dreams and thoughts assisted their chisels in carving the stones.

Michéle de Burne and André Mariolle wandered arm in arm through these galleries, while the rest of the party, who were somewhat fatigued, admired them from a distance.

"How beautiful it all is," she murmured again.

"I know not where I am, nor what I see," he replied. "I only feel that you are near me."

She smiled, looking up into his face, and repeated the single word :

"André."

He understood that she had at last surrendered; and they resumed their walk in silence, being too much overpowered by emotion for words.

They still continued their inspection of the

monument, but scarcely seeing anything until they reached the beautifully carved staircase which led to an arch thrown between two towers, seeming to scale the heavens. A dizzy granite path encircled the last tower ; it was called the Fool's walk, and was without a parapet.

“Can we go up ?” she asked.

The guide replied that it was forbidden, but at the sight of a twenty-franc piece he hesitated.

The whole family, who had now rejoined them, opposed the project ; but, turning to Mariolle, Mme. de Burne asked him if he were also afraid to undertake its passage.

“I have passed more dangerous places,” he answered, laughing, and, without another word to the others, they passed on.

He went first along the narrow cornice at the edge of the precipice, and she followed closely, gliding along the wall, with her eyes half closed, fearing to look at the yawning gulf below. She was almost fainting from fright, and clung tightly to the hand he extended to her, but, feeling him so strong, without fear, and his step so firm and fearless,

she thought to herself, enraptured notwithstanding her fright: "Truly he is a man." They were alone in space, as high as the birds of the sea ever soared, dominating the same horizon that these white winged creatures wander over incessantly in their flight, and explore with their small yellow eyes.

Feeling her trembling, Mariolle asked, softly: "Are you dizzy?"

"A little," she replied, in a low voice; "but with you I fear nothing."

Coming nearer, he threw an arm around her, and, feeling reassured by this support, she ventured to raise her head and look around her.

He was almost carrying her, and she abandoned herself to his care, enjoying the robust protection which seemed to carry her through the air. Yet she felt thankful, with the thankfulness of the romantic woman, that he did not spoil this sublime moment with kisses.

When they rejoined the party, M. de Pradon, who had been wild with anxiety, exclaimed, angrily:

“Heavens ! what a stupid thing you have done !”

“No,” she replied, with conviction ; “it was not stupid, since we have succeeded. Nothing is stupid when it is successful.”

He shrugged his shoulders, and they went down again, stopping only a few moments to buy some views of the place, from the gate-keeper ; so, when they reached the hotel, it was almost dinner time. The landlady advised them to take a walk on the sands near the shore, and view the Mont from the sea, where, she said, it presented its most magnificent aspect.

Although much fatigued, they set off at once, making the circuit of the ramparts by going a little distance into the dangerous downs ; so treacherous with its appearance of solidity, and where the foot sunk suddenly to the ankle into the beautiful yellow carpet of deceiving golden sands.

From that side, the abbey, losing its aspect of a marine cathedral, which it possessed when seen from the terrace, suddenly assumed the warlike air of a feudal manor, menacing the ocean with its tall, indented

walls, pierced with loop-holes, and supported by its gigantic buttresses imbedded in the foot of the mountain. But Mme. de Burne and André Mariolle paid little attention to all this. Their thoughts were entirely of themselves; entwined in that net which they had spread for each other, and inclosed in that prison in which we know nothing more of the outside world and see but one being.

When they were again seated at the table under the gay lights of the lamps, they awakened from their dream, and perceived that they were, nevertheless, very hungry; and, when dinner was at last over, they forgot the moonlight in the pleasures of conversation. Besides, they felt no inclination to go out, and no one spoke of it.

The full moon might light up with poetic brightness the thin flow of the ascending tide, already gliding over the sands with its almost imperceptible and terrifying noise. It might light up the ramparts encircling the Mont, and illuminate the downs, the bay, and the romantic shadows of all the towers of the abbey — they had no desire to see any more.

It was hardly ten o'clock when Mme. Val-

saci, who was almost overcome by sleep, spoke of retiring. The proposition was gladly accepted by all, and, having bidden each other a cordial good-night, they retired.

André Mariolle, knowing that he could not sleep, lighted the two candles on the chimney-piece, opened the window, and looked out into the night.

His heart faltered under the torture of futile hope. He knew her to be there, so near, separated from him by two doors only, and it was almost as impossible to reach her as it was to stop the flow of the tide then inundating the downs. He felt an inclination to cry out in this torture of unappeasable and vain waiting; and he asked himself what he should do, as he could no longer endure the solitude of this night of sterile happiness.

Quiet now reigned in the hotel and in the only street of the town. Mariolle still remained leaning on the window, looking at the silvery sheet of the ascending tide, and putting off incessantly the hour of going to bed, as if he had a presentiment of he knew not what providential fortune.

He was suddenly awakened from his reverie

by the thought that a hand had touched his door-knob. He turned his head quickly, and saw that the door was slowly opening. A woman entered, her head concealed under a white lace veil, and her whole form enveloped in a large cloak, which seemed made of silk, of cashmere and of snow. She closed the door noiselessly behind her ; then, as if she had not seen him standing and overwhelmed with joy near the window, she walked straight to the chimney-piece and extinguished the two candles.



CHAPTER II.

NEXT morning André Mariolle was the first to come down, and awaited the others to bid them good-bye. He awaited her appearance with a poignant sentiment of disquietude and happiness. What would she do? What would she be? What would come to both? On what happy or terrible adventure had they entered? She could make of him whatever she wished: the happiest of mortals or a martyr to unsatisfied desires.

When would they meet again? Would she abridge or lengthen her visit, thus postponing her return? He had a morbid fear of her first glance and her first words, for he had not seen her face, and but little had been said during their meeting of the night before.

There remained to André Mariolle, of this rapid and odd interview, the imperceptible deception of a man who has not gathered in

all the crop of the love he had thought ripe, and the intoxication of triumph at the same time.

He now heard her voice, and it made him tremble. She was talking loud, irritated by some altercation with her father, and, when he saw her on the lower steps of the stairway, her face betrayed her impatience.

Mariolle came toward her; she saw him and smiled. In her suddenly calmed eyes there came a look of happiness that brightened up her whole face, and in the quick extending of her hand he had the confirmation of the gift she had made of herself to him, without restraint and without repentance.

"Then, we are about to part," said she.

"Alas! yes, madame," said he; "and it pains me more than I can say."

"It will not be for long," she murmured, and, as M. de Pradon joined them at this moment, she whispered :

"Tell them that you are going to Brittany for ten days, but do not go."

"Your father tells me that you leave us day after to-morrow!" exclaimed her aunt, who now made her appearance. "It surely

cannot be true, for you had promised to remain until Monday."

"Yes; I must go," replied Mme. de Burne; "the sea air has, as usual, caused return of my neuralgia, and, in fact, I have made up my mind to return, that I may not be ill the rest of the summer. But this is hardly the time to speak of that."

At this moment Mariolle's coachman warned him that it was time to go if he wished to catch the train at Pontorson.

"And when do you return to Paris?" asked Mme. de Burne.

"I cannot say with certainty," he replied; "I am going to Saint Malo, Brest, Donar-nenez; in fact, I shall visit all the celebrated points of Brittany. It will certainly take me — from fifteen to twenty days," he added, hesitatingly.

"That is quite a long time," she laughed; "as for me, if I suffer again as I did last night, I shall return within two days."

Overcome by emotion, he wanted to cry out his thanks; he, however, contented himself by imprinting a lover's kiss on her extended hand.

And after exchanging a thousand compliments, thanks and affirmations of sympathy with the Valsacis and M. de Pradon, who was somewhat reassured by the announcement of that journey, he hurried away, looking back at her as long as he could see.

He returned to Paris without stopping or seeing anything on the way. During the night, reclining in the corner of his compartment, his eyes half closed, his arms crossed, he gave himself up to the one recollection, the one thought of his dream realized. As soon as he reached home, he went at once into his library, where he was used to write and practice, and where he always found a calming influence from the near neighborhood of books, his piano, and his violin. But he had no sooner seated himself than the feverish impatience of his insatiable heart returned to torture and agitate him. Surprised to find that none of his usual pastimes had any interest for him, he asked himself what he should do to appease this new uneasiness. A desire to go out, to walk, to move about, seemed to take possession of him. He was unable to analyze this crisis of

agitation, imparted by the mind to the body, and which is simply the unappeasable desire of searching for or finding some one.

He hastily put on his overcoat, took his hat, and opened the door. As he was descending the stairs, he asked himself: "Where am I going?" Then, suddenly, an idea he had not thought of before came to him — for the secrecy of their meetings he required a house, at once pretty and retired.

He searched, he walked through avenues, boulevards, streets, examined suspiciously the smiling janitors, who lauded their apartments effusively, and returned at night utterly discouraged. The next morning at nine o'clock he resumed his search, and, finally, just at nightfall, he discovered, in a small street at Auteuil, a solitary villa, situated at the extremity of a garden having three exits. This the house-furnisher in the neighborhood promised to fit up in two days. Mariolle chose the materials, desiring only simple furniture of varnished wood, and thick carpets. The caretaker of the garden was a baker, who lived near one of the gates. He made arrangements with this man and wife to keep the

cottage in order, and a neighboring florist undertook to keep the vases filled with flowers.

All these arrangements had kept him until nine o'clock, and, when he reached home, almost worn out, he found a dispatch on his writing-desk awaiting him. He eagerly opened it, and read as follows:

"I will be at home to-morrow night. Will send instructions.

"MICHE."

He had not written to her, fearing the letter might miscarry, as she was to leave Avranches. As soon as he had dined, he seated himself at his desk and began to write, trying to express to her all that filled his soul. It was a long and difficult task, for all expressions, phrases and ideas seemed feeble, mediocre and ridiculous, to express so delicate and passionate an appeal.

The letter he received next morning confirmed the intelligence of her return the same evening, and begged him to remain quiet for a few days, that his friends might believe he was still out of the city. And she requested him to meet her on the terrace of the Tuileries overlooking the Seine, at ten o'clock the next morning.

He was there an hour too soon, and wandered through the large garden just now deserted except for a few passers-by, clerks in public offices hurrying to their occupation, jostling along with laborers of all races and colors. He felt a rare pleasure in looking at these people, whom the necessity of earning their daily bread forced to work at hateful occupations, and who were now hurrying past him. Comparing them to himself in this hour, when he awaited his mistress, a queen of the world, he felt himself a being so fortunate, so privileged, that he was inclined to thank the blue heavens; for Providence was to him but so many alternations of azure and rain, due to Hazard, who was the sullen master of man and of day.

A few minutes before ten he returned to the terrace and awaited her arrival.

"She will be late, no doubt," he said to himself. But the sound of the last stroke of the hour, struck by the clock in the neighboring monument, had scarcely died away, when he imagined he saw her in the distance crossing the garden at a rapid rate, like a belated clerk hurrying to his work. He hesitated;

“was it really she?” he recognized her gait, but was astounded at her changed appearance, so modest, in her plain black dress. She came straight to the stairway of the terrace, as if accustomed to the place.

“She must like this vicinity, and no doubt frequently takes her walks in this direction,” he thought. He saw her raise her dress to ascend the first step, and he hurried to meet her.

She smiled when she saw him, but said, uneasily: “You are very imprudent. You should not show yourself so publicly. I saw you almost from the Rue de Rivoli. Come, let us seat ourselves on that bench over there; that is where you must await me the next time.”

He could not help asking: “Then, you come here often?”

“Yes; I like this place very much, and, as I am an early riser, I come here for exercise, and to enjoy the view, which is so pretty from this point. And, besides, one never meets anybody here, while at the Bois it is always crowded. But you must keep this a secret.”

“I shall guard it sacredly,” he laughed.

Then discreetly taking one of the little hands, hidden in the folds of her dress, he murmured

How much I love you My heart is sick with waiting. Did you receive my letter ? ”

“ Yes, and it moved me very much,” replied she.

“ Then, you are not angry with me ? ” he asked.

“ Why, no. Why should I be, you are so kind ? ” answered she.

He was searching for ardent words; words vibrating with love and emotion. Finding none, and too much affected for other thoughts, he could only repeat :

“ How much I love you ! ”

“ I met you here, because the place reminds me of over there, somewhat, on account of the water,” said she.

They were seated near the stone balustrade, on the edge of the river, almost alone, and hidden from all curious eyes. Two gardeners and a few children, accompanied by their nurse, were the only living beings on the long terrace at this hour.

Time passed on, the carriages rolled by on the quay at their feet, footsteps hurried by on the promenade near the wall, and still they remained silent, looking at this beautiful Parisian landscape extending from Ile St. Louis, and the tower of Notre Dame to the Coteaux de Meudon.

Mme. de Burne was the first to break the silence, with a commonplace remark :

“How very pretty it is here,” said she.

But suddenly seized with the thrilling remembrance of their walk in mid-air, on the summit of the tower of the abbey, and devoured by the regret of by-gone emotions, he replied :

“Do you remember our flight in the Fool’s walk ?”

“Yes, and it frightens me now that I think of it. Heavens ! how dizzy it would make me were I to try it again ; but just then I was quite intoxicated by the bracing air, the sun and the sea. But the scenery now before us is quite as beautiful. I love Paris above all.”

He was surprised and shocked, having a confused presentiment that something which

had appeared in her over there, existed no longer.

“Never mind the view, as long as we are together,” he murmured.

She pressed his hand without replying. Then, more penetrated with happiness by this light pressure, than he could have been by affectionate words, he felt the gloom that had oppressed his heart suddenly lifted, and he could now give vent to his pent-up emotion. He told her, in almost solemn words, that he had given her his whole heart and soul; and that she could do as she pleased with him.

She was grateful, but a victim of modern suspicions and cutting ironies, she smiled as she replied:

“Do not promise too much.”

He turned his eyes on hers, looking at her with that penetrating look of love and emotion, and repeated to her, more ardently and more poetically, all he had said.

All he had written in that avalanche of burning letters, he now expressed in words with so much fervor and conviction that she listened as if in a cloud of incense. She felt

more caressed by those adoring lips, than she had been by any previous appeal.

When he had ended, she said, simply: "I love you very much, also."

They remained, hand-in-hand, like peasants on the country road-side, looking vaguely at the gliding boats on the river. They were alone in Paris, in this immense confusion floating around them in that city full of life, more than they had been at the summit of that aërial tower. And for a few seconds they forgot that any one else existed on the face of the earth.

She was the first to return to a sentiment of reality. "Shall we meet here again to-morrow?" said she.

He reflected a few seconds, evidently embarrassed by what he was about to ask, then said:

"Yes — yes — certainly — but — shall we not meet somewhere else? This place — is solitary — nevertheless — everybody can come here."

She hesitated, then said:

"That is true — and, besides, you must keep in hiding for fifteen days at least, that

your friends may believe in your journey. It would certainly be nice and very mysterious to meet without the knowledge of any one in Paris. But I cannot receive you in my own house at present. Therefore —— I do not see ——.”

“Neither can I invite you to my apartments, but is there not another way, some other place?” he said, blushing.

She showed neither surprise nor anger, being a woman of practical sense, of modern ideas, and without false modesty.

“Why, yes,” she said: “only it would require time to think of it.”

“But I have thought of it,” added he.

“Already?” she asked.

“Yes, madame.”

“Well, what is it?”

“Do you know the Rue des Vieux-Champs, at Auteuil?” he asked.

“No, I do not,” replied she.

“It extends from the Rue Tournemine to the Rue Jean-de-Saulye.” Well, in that street is a cottage in the center of a pretty garden, having three exits on the streets I have named.

“And ?” she interjected.

“That cottage is at your disposal,” replied he.

She reflected a moment; then, without any embarrassment, asked a few questions of feminine prudence.

His explanation was evidently satisfactory, for she murmured, as she arose to go :

“I will be there to-morrow at three o’clock.”

“I shall await you near the gate. Do not forget it is number seven,” he said.

“Very well. Adieu until to-morrow,” she replied.

“A thousand thanks, my adored one. Adieu.”

“Do not accompany me,” said she, “but remain here ten minutes at least, and then return by another way.”

She went off, walking so rapidly, with an air so discreet, so modest, so hurried, that she really resembled one of those sly and industrious daughters of Paris who parade the streets in the morning on their way to their honest occupations.

He hurried off to Auteuil, tormented by the fear that the cottage would not be in

readiness on the morrow. But he found it full of workmen; the hangings already on the walls, the carpets on the floors; all was noise and bustle in the hurry of preparations. In the spacious garden, the remains of an ancient park, were a number of fine old trees, and several groves of smaller ones simulating a forest. Among these trees were several winding paths, and the gardener had already planted rosebushes, pinks, geraniums, and a score of other species of those plants which, with attentive care, are so quick in expanding that in almost a single day they transform a disordered field into a flower garden.

Mariolle was as joyous as if he had gained a victory over her, and, having obtained the promise of the purveyor that all would be in readiness at noon the next day, he went out to purchase all sorts of knickknacks to adorn the interior of this dwelling. For the walls, he chose some admirable engravings; reproductions of celebrated paintings; porcelain by Deck for the chimney-piece and tables, and a few of those familiar objects which women love to have about them.

He spent three months of his income in that

one day, and he spent with pleasure. He had economized incessantly for the last ten years, not from motives of economy, but simply because he had never needed large sums of money, and his accumulated income now permitted him to spend lavishly.

Early next morning he returned to the cottage to superintend the last arrangements. He hung the pictures himself, climbed up ladders, burned delicate perfumes in the rooms, and sprinkled large quantities of it on the hangings and even on the carpets. In his feverish excitement and rapture of his whole being, he had the impression that he was doing the most interesting and most delicious work he had ever done. He consulted the clock every instant, calculating the hours that must yet elapse before her coming, then he would urge his assistants to renewed efforts, and did all he could himself to arrange and dispose everything to the best advantage.

Through motives of prudence he dismissed everybody before two o'clock, and then in this last hour of waiting in this house of silence, he awaited the greatest happiness he had ever hoped for. He wandered from one room to

the other, talking aloud, and dreaming of the deep joys of love he was about to taste.

He then went into the garden. The rays of the sun, gliding through the thick foliage, shone brightly on a lovely basket of roses ; he stopped to admire them for a few moments, then passed on and placed himself behind the gate, opening it now and then through fear that she might make a mistake.

Three o'clock came at last, and the strokes were repeated by all the convents and workshops in the vicinity. He was now standing with his watch in his hand, and suddenly two light raps on the gate made him tremble with astonishment, for he had heard no footsteps on the walk.

He opened the gate. It was indeed she. She looked around in surprise, first inspecting, with an uneasy glance, the nearest dwellings. She was soon reassured, for certainly no one who dwelt in these modest cottages could know her. She then resumed her inspection of the garden, with a satisfied curiosity, and finally she placed the tips of her fingers on her lover's lips, and took his

arm. They walked on toward the cottage, and she exclaimed, at each step :

“ How beautiful ! How unexpected ! How charming ! ”

At this moment she perceived the roses brightened by the sunlight, and she exclaimed, in delight:

“ Why, it is fairy land, my dear friend ! ”

She gathered one of the roses, kissed it, and placed it at her waist. They then entered the cottage, and she seemed so pleased and happy that he felt a desire to throw himself on his knees before her; although in his heart he felt that she might perhaps have paid less attention to her surroundings and a little more to himself. She looked around her, seemingly as pleased as a child who finds a new plaything; and she appreciated all this elegance with the satisfaction of a connoisseur whose taste has been flattered. She had feared to find a commonplace dwelling, with hangings faded and soiled by other rendez-vous. On the contrary, this pretty tomb of her feminine virtue was new, coquettish, created for herself, and must have cost a great deal. Indeed, this man was perfect.

She turned and raised her two arms to him with a ravishing gesture of appeal, and they met in one of those embraces which loving hearts only can appreciate.

Before separating they went around the garden once more, and seated themselves in one of those retreats of verdure, hidden from the outside world. André was exuberant, speaking to her as if she were a goddess who had come down from her sacred pedestal for him, and she listened with that languid look in her eyes he had often seen when wearied by the prolonged visit of tiresome people. She remained still affectionate, however, her face lighted up by a tender though somewhat constrained smile, and still holding his hand, which she clasped, perhaps more through absent-mindedness than from affection.

Her thoughts must have been elsewhere, for she interrupted him in the middle of a phrase, saying :

“ I must go at once, as I am to be at the Marquise de Bratiane’s at six o’clock, and I am already late.”

He conducted her to the gate through which he had admitted her. They kissed

affectionately, and, after casting a furtive glance into the street, she departed, gliding along the wall.

As soon as he was again alone he felt that void we experience after the departure of a beloved woman, and that strange tightening of the heart caused by the flight of departing footsteps. He felt abandoned and solitary, and began to walk rapidly on the graveled paths, thinking of the eternal contradiction of hope and reality.

He remained there until nightfall, trying to restore his serenity, and he gave himself to her from afar more assuredly than she had ever surrendered herself to him; he then returned to his apartments, dined without remarking what he ate, and wrote her a long letter before retiring.

The next day seemed terribly long, and the evening interminable; so he wrote again. But no answer came until the second day, when he received a telegram appointing the next day for a new rendezvous, at the same hour. This little message delivered him from the fever of waiting he was suffering.

She came as she had the first time, punctual,

affectionate, and smiling, and their second meeting at the little cottage at Auteuil was as delicious as their first. André Mariolle was at first surprised, then vaguely disappointed, to see that their love did not ripen into that ecstatic passion that he had hoped for; but he soon forgot this unrealized dream in the somewhat different happiness he had obtained. He became attached to her by her caresses, which is the strongest link, the only link we can never break when it has once entwined us.

Twenty days passed on, so full of sweetness and happiness that it seemed to him they would never end, that he would always remain there, living for her only, and, in his thoughts, always devoured by expectations, had been born an impossible hope of a discreet life, both happy and hidden.

She came every three days, without resistance, attracted as much by the charm of the little cottage, now become a conservatory of rare flowers, and by the novelty of this life of love and mystery, which was scarcely dangerous, since no one had the right to follow her, as by the increasing tenderness of her lover.

“ You must reappear in the world now, my dear friend,” she said to him one day. “ You must come and spend the afternoon with me to-morrow; I have announced that you had returned.”

“ Oh ! why so soon ? ” he said, overcome with sorrow.

“ Because, if it became accidentally known that you were in Paris, your presence here would be inexplicable enough to give birth to suppositions.”

He admitted that she was right, and promised to be at her house next day.

“ Then, you receive to-morrow ? ” he asked.

“ Yes,” she answered; “ in fact, I am to have a little entertainment to-morrow.”

“ What kind of an entertainment ? ” he asked, displeased.

After a great deal of coaxing, she said, laughing:

“ I have persuaded Massival to produce his *Didon*, which no one has ever heard, at my house. It is a poem of ancient love; and Mme. de Bratiane, who considers herself the sole proprietress of Massival, is exasperated.

She will be present, as she is one of the singers. Am I not powerful ? ”

“ Will you have many people ? ” he asked.

“ Oh ! no; only a few intimate friends. You know them nearly all,” replied she.

“ Can you not dispense with my presence ? I am so happy in my solitude,” he added.

“ Oh ! no, my friend. Remember that I care more for you than all the others,” she said, tenderly.

“ Thank you; I shall be there,” replied he, his heart beating with joy.



CHAPTER III.

“GOOD day, my dear monsieur.”

Mariolle remarked that it was no longer the dear friend of Auteuil, and she gave him but a hasty pressure of the hand, like a woman much occupied with social duties.

He had entered the drawing-room as Mme. de Burne was welcoming Mme. Le Prieur, whose bold décolletage and pretensions to a sculptural form had obtained for her the ironical surname of the “Goddess.” She was the wife of a member of the institute.

“Ah! Mariolle,” cried Lamarthe, “where have you been all this time, my dear friend. We thought you were dead.”

I have just returned from a trip to Finistère, he answered, and proceeded to relate his impressions of that place, but the novelist soon interrupted him, asking if he knew the Baronne de Frémines.

“No,” he answered; “that is, I know her by sight only, but I have heard a great deal

of her; she is said to be a very curious woman."

"She is the archduchess of the frivolous ones, but of such tact; in fact, an exquisite bouquet of modernity. Come, I will present you."

Taking his arm, he dragged him toward the young woman, who was always compared to a doll—a pale, ravishing little blonde doll, invented and created by the devil himself for the perdition of grown-up children with whiskers. Her eyes were long, narrow, and oblique, resembling those of the Chinese race. The light from the dark-blue pupils glided from half-open eyelids—they were slow eyelids, and rarely opened, made to veil the thoughts of this mysterious creature.

Her hair was blonde, the mouth small and clearly cut, as if sketched by a miniaturist. The voice emitted from between her thin lips vibrated like crystal, and her words were always unexpected, cutting, wicked and amusing, and of that destructive charm of the soulless woman of the world. The tranquil complication of this accomplished coquette always filled her surroundings with violent

agitations and passions. She was known through Paris as the most extravagant, and also the wittiest, of her set, but no one ever knew what she was, what she thought or what she did, and she dominated over men in general with an irresistible power.

Her husband, equally, remained an enigma. In his affability and dignity he seemed to see nothing. Was he blind, indifferent, or complacent? Perhaps there was really nothing to see but eccentricities, which, no doubt, he found very amusing. All sorts of opinions obtained currency concerning him. It was even hinted that he profited by the secret vices of his wife.

Between Mme. de Burne and herself there existed powerful natural attractions and ferocious jealousies. Short periods of friendship were followed by fits of furious enmity. They pleased, feared, and sought each other, like two professional duelists who appreciate each other's value, and wish to fight to the death.

The Baronne de Frémines was just now triumphant. She had just obtained a great victory, having captured Lamarthe; she had

detached him from Mme. de Burne, to ostensibly domesticate him among her own chosen followers. The novelist was infatuated, puzzled, charmed and astonished with all he had discovered in this improbable creature, and he spoke of her incessantly.

As he presented her to Mariolle, Mme. de Burne, who was occupied at the other end of the room, glanced uneasily in their direction.

“Look at the displeased look of our hostess,” said Lamarthe, smiling.

André raised his eyes, but Mme. de Burne had already turned to Massival, who just now made his appearance between the portières, followed closely by the Marquise de Bratiane.

“There!” exclaimed Lamarthe; “we shall have but a second rendering of *Didon*, for the first must have taken place in the coupé of the marquise.”

“Our friend, Mme. de Burne, is certainly losing the brightest jewels of her collection,” added Mme. de Frémines, maliciously.

A sort of hatred against this woman was suddenly awakened in the heart of Mariolle. He felt an irritation against everybody, against the habits of these people, their ideas,

their tastes, their futile propensities and their clownish amusements.

Then, as Lamarthe bent over to whisper a few words in her ear, he turned his back and walked away, stopping near the beautiful Mme. Le Prieur, who was standing alone at this moment.

According to Lamarthe, Mme. Le Prieur represented ancient respectability in this advance guard of modernism. She was young, tall and pretty, with regular features and reddish brown hair. She captivated by her benevolent and tranquil charms, by a calm and perfect coquetry, and also by her great desire of pleasing, dissimulated under a sincere and simple affection.

She had ardent partisans, whom she was careful not to expose to dangerous rivalries. Her house was said to be a narrow circle of intimates, and the frequenters were unanimous in their praises of her husband's merits.

She and Mariolle were soon in the midst of a pleasant conversation. She appreciated this intelligent and reserved man, of whom she had heard but little, but who was, perhaps, worth more than all the others.

The last of the expected guests were arriving : big Fresnol, puffing and mopping his perspiring and shining forehead with his handkerchief ; the worldly philosopher, George de Maltry ; then the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin, who came in together.

M. de Pradon was assisting his daughter in doing the honors, and he was full of attentions toward Mariolle. But Mariolle watched her come and go among her guests, and it wrung his heart to see that she gave him no more thought than to any one else. Twice, it is true, she had given him a rapid glance from afar, which seemed to say : "I am thinking of you," but these had been so swift that he might have been mistaken in their meaning, and, besides, he could not help noticing that Lamarthe's aggressive assiduity for Mme. de Frémines irritated Mme. de Burne. "It is only," he thought to himself, "the vexation of a coquette, the jealousy of the worldly woman from whom a rare knickknack has been stolen." He suffered terribly ; he suffered especially at perceiving that she looked at them incessantly in a furtive and badly dissimulated manner, and that his own attentions

to Mme. Le Prieur caused her no uneasiness whatever. It was undoubtedly because she was sure of him, while Lamarthe was escaping her.

Then, what was this love to her ; this love born of yesterday, and which controlled his entire being ?

At this moment M. de Pradon gave the signal for silence. Massival was opening the piano, and Mme. de Bratiane was approaching, taking off her gloves, for she was to sing the transports of *Didon*, when the door opened once more, and a young man on whom all eyes were instantly turned, entered the room.

He was tall and slight, with curling whiskers, short blonde hair, and of a very aristocratic bearing. Even Mme. Le Prieur seemed affected.

“Who is he ?” asked Mariolle.

“Why, do you not know him ?” she asked, surprised.

“No ; I do not,” he replied.

“He is the Count Rodolphe de Bernhaus.”

“Ah ! he who fought and killed Sigismond Fabre ?”

“Yes ; the same,” she replied.

The story of this duel had created a sensation. The Count de Bernhaus was attached to the Austrian embassy, and was a diplomate with a brilliant future before him, a veritable Bismarck. One evening at an official reception, he had overheard some slighting remarks about his sovereign, and resented them at once, with the inevitable result of a duel. His adversary was one of the most noted swordsmen of the day, but Bernhaus had killed him. This immediately acquired for him a celebrity *à la* Sarah Bernhardt, with the difference that his name appeared encircled in an aureole of poetic chivalry. Moreover, he was charming, a pleasant conversationalist, and exceedingly distinguished. Lamarthe called him: "The tamer of our beautiful, ferocious women."

He took a seat beside Mme. de Burne, with that air of gallantry that distinguished him, while Massival ran his fingers lightly over the ivory keys.

All the guests changed their places, approaching nearer that they might see as well as hear the singer. In these changes Lamarthe found himself near Mariolle.

There was a silence of attention and expectation; the musician began a slow, a very slow succession of notes, as if he were giving a musical recital. There were pauses, slight reprisals, series of little phrases, now languishing, then nervous and agitated, but of surprising originality.

Mariolle was dreaming. He saw a woman in the full beauty of ripe womanhood, walking slowly by his side on the sands, bathed by the sea. He felt that she suffered, that her soul was filled with a presentiment of unhappiness; then his gaze returned to Mme. de Bratiane.

Motionless, pale under the mass of her heavy black hair, that seemed dipped into the night, this Italian woman, her eyes fixed before her, was waiting. There was in her determined face, and in her whole powerful and passionate being, something startling, one of those menacing storms that we augur from the somber heavens.

Massival still continued the sorrowful history he was relating in those sonorous tones.

Suddenly a shudder agitated the frame of the singer. She opened her lips, and there

came forth a wail of interminable and heart-rending anguish. Not one of those tones of tragic despair that singers on the stage exhale with dramatic gestures, neither was it one of those thrilling wails of deceived love that stir the sympathy of the audience; but it was the inexpressible cry from the body, not the soul, uttered like the howl of a crushed beast, or the cry of the feminine animal betrayed.

There was a hush, and then Massival resumed, with even more animation, the history of that miserable queen, abandoned by the man she loved.

Then again her voice arose. She was now speaking, telling of the intolerable torture of solitude, of the unappeasable thirst of past caresses, and the agony of knowing that he was gone forever.

Her vibrating and expressive voice made the hearts of her hearers shudder. This somber Italian, with her midnight hair, seemed to suffer all she told, to love, or at least to be capable of loving, with a furious ardor. When she had ended, her eyes were full of tears, and, while she wiped them slowly away,

Lamarthe, trembling with artistic emotion, leaned over to Mariolle, and said:

“Heavens! how beautiful she is at this moment. She is indeed a woman! the only one here.” Then, after a few seconds of reflection, he added:

“But, then, who can say? It is, perhaps, only the mirage of music, for nothing exists but illusions. But what art it requires to produce this illusion! in fact, all illusions.”

There was an intermission between the first and second parts of this musical poem; and both the composer and its interpreter were warmly congratulated. Lamarthe especially was most ardent in his compliments; and he was truly sincere, being a man gifted to feel and understand. He was touched equally by all expressed forms of beauty. The flattering manner with which he told Mme. de Bratiane of the emotions he had felt in listening, brought the color to her cheeks, and the other women who listened were filled with vexation. He was not, perhaps, unconscious of the effect he had produced.

When he returned to take his seat near Mme. de Frémines, he found it occupied by

the Count Rodolphe de Bernhaus. They seemed to be enjoying a confidential conversation, smiling as if enchanted, and charmed by what they had to say. Mariolle, who was more and more gloomy, was leaning in the doorway when the novelist joined him. Big Fresnol, George de Maltry, Baron de Graviil, and Comte Marantin were surrounding Mme. de Burne, who was pouring out the tea. She seemed inclosed in a crown of admirers. Lamarthe remarked it ironically to his friend, adding:

“It is a crown without jewels, however ; and I am certain she would give all those Rhine stones for the brilliant that is wanting.”

“What brilliant ?” asked Mariolle.

“Why, Bernhaus, of course ; the handsome, irresistible, incomparable Bernhaus, for whom this fête is given, for whom this miracle has been accomplished. That is, the miracle of deciding Massival to produce his *Didon Florentine* here.”

André, though incredulous, felt wounded to the heart.

“Has she known him long ?” asked he.

“Oh, no ! ten days at the most ; but she

has made strenuous efforts, and employed many tactics to conquer. Had you been here you would have been much amused."

"Ah! why should I?" interposed André.

"She met him for the first time in Mme. de Frémines' drawing-room. I was dining there that evening. Bernhaus is more than welcome there, as you can see. And behold! the moment they had been presented, Mme. de Burne began at once the conquest of this unique Austrian. And she is succeeding, she will succeed, although the little Frémines is her superior in tactics, in real indifference, and, perhaps, in perversity. But, then, our friend de Burne is more perfect in coquetry, more woman; I mean more of the modern woman. That is, she is irresistible through the artifices of seduction, which replaces in her the ancient and natural charm. Yet it is not quite the artifice, I should say, but the esthetic, the profound sense of the feminine esthetic; all her power lies in that. She knows herself to be admirable, because she is more pleased with herself than with anything else, and she never makes a mistake on the best means of conquering a man.

She is always sure to display the merits most likely to capture us."

"I believe you exaggerate," protested Mariolle. "With me she has always been very simple."

"Because simplicity is the bait that attracts you ; however, I do not wish to say anything against her; I think her superior to all of her kind. But, then, they are not women."

Here they were interrupted by the sound of music, and Mme. de Bratiane sang the second part of the poem, in which she was truly a superb Didon of physical passion and sensual despair.

But Lamarthe's eyes never left Mme. de Frémines and Count de Bernhaus.

As soon as the last vibration of the piano had died away amid the loud applause, he resumed, with a tinge of irritation in his voice, as if continuing a discussion, or as if answering an adversary:

"No; they are not women. The most honest among them are unscrupulous jades; the better I know them, the less I find in them that sensation of sweet happiness that a true

woman should give us. They intoxicate us, it is true, but it is by exasperating our nerves, for they are adulterated. Oh! it is well enough to taste it, but it is not worth the true wine of other days. As you know, my dear friend, woman was created and placed into this world for two things only, 'love and children.' These are the only things that will make her true and excellent qualities bloom. I am speaking like M. Prudhomme. They are incapable of love, and they do not want children; when they do have them, by accident, it is first a misfortune, then a burden. Truly they are monsters!"

Astonished at the violent tone of the writer and the angry look in his eyes, Mariolle asked:

"Then, why do you spend half of your life tagged onto their skirts?"

"Why? why?" repeated Lamarthe, with vivacity; "why? Because they interest me. *Parbleu*. And then — and then — would you forbid doctors to enter the hospitals to look at the sick? These women are my clinic."

This last reflection seemed to calm him, and he added:

"Then, I admire them because they are

well enough for to-day; and, at heart, I am no more a man than they are women. When I have become somewhat attached to one of them, I amuse myself by discovering and examining all that would repel me, with the curiosity of a chemist who poisons himself to experiment with venoms."

After a short silence, he again resumed: "In that way, I shall never be really pinched by them. I can play their game as well as they; better, perhaps; and, besides, they are useful for my books, while their doings are of no use to them. How stupid they are! All failures, delicious failures! who, when they become sensible of their misfortunes, are devoured with regret as they grow old."

While Mariolle listened, he felt one of those sadnesses invading his heart, like the damp melancholy with which long continued rains depress the earth.

Somewhat irritated, he protested, not so much to defend woman as to indicate the causes of their disenchanting mobility, which were due to the literature of the day.

"At the time when poets and novelists exalted and made them dream," said he, "they

searched, and believed they found in life the equivalent of what their heart had discovered in the literature of the period. To-day you obstinately suppress all the poetic and seductive appearances, to show only the disillusioning realities. Therefore, my dear friend, if you had more love in your books, there would be more of it in life; you were inventors of ideals; they believed in your inventions. Now you only evoke precise realities, and they have come to believe in the vulgarity of all things."

Lamarthe, whom all literary discussions interested, was beginning a dissertation, when Mme. de Burne approached.

This was one of her good days. She wore a ravishing costume, and had that audacious and provoking expression which the sensation of a struggle always gave her. She smiled, saying:

"This is what I enjoy: to surprise two men who are conversing, without speaking of me. You are, nevertheless, the only two interested beings here. What were you discussing?"

Lamarthe, without any embarrassment, and in a tone of bantering gallantry, revealed the

subject of their conversation. He then resumed his arguments with a vim accentuated by a desire of parade, which excites all seekers of fame before women.

The subject of this discussion immediately interested her, and, excited by the arguments, she defended the modern woman with a great deal of intelligence, wit and *à propos*. A few phrases on fidelity and attachment, of which the more susceptible are capable, made Mariolle's heart beat, though this was incomprehensible to the novelist. And when she had left them to join Mme. de Frémines, who had obstinately retained Count de Bernhaus at her side until now, Lamarthe and Mariolle, charmed by all the grace and feminine science she had displayed, declared to each other that she was incontestably exquisite.

"And look at her now!" exclaimed the novelist.

It was the grand duel. What would these two women and the Austrian speak of now? Mme. de Burne had arrived just at that moment when the too prolonged tête-à-tête of two persons, even when pleasant, becomes

monotonous, and she interrupted them by relating, with an indignant air, all she had heard from the lips of Lamarthe. Indeed, all this could be well applied to Mme. de Frémines, as it was due to her most recent conquest, and, moreover, it was repeated before a man who was intelligent enough to understand it all. This eternal question of love turned again into a warm discussion, and the hostess soon beckoned Mariolle and Lamarthe to join them ; then, as the discussion became more animated, she called everybody.

A general discussion followed, gay and passionate, in which each one found something to say, and in which Mme. de Burne found the means of being the wittiest and the most amusing. She even allowed herself to be carried away by sentiment, fictitious perhaps, and gave very interesting opinions, for this was truly one of her days of success. She was more animated, more intelligent and prettier than ever.

CHAPTER IV.

As soon as André Mariolle had left Mme. de Burne, the charm of her presence faded away ; he felt in him and around him, in his flesh, in his soul, in the air and in everything, a sort of evaporation of the happiness of living that had sustained and animated him for some time past.

What had taken place ? Nothing, almost nothing. She had been charming for him at the end of the evening ; by one or two glances she had said : “ There is no one here but you for me.” And notwithstanding this, she had just made revelations to him that he would have wished to ignore always. That also was nothing, almost nothing ; but he, nevertheless, remained stupefied, like a man who has just discovered a suspicious action of his father or mother. He had learned that during those twenty days that he had believed entirely devoted to him, as he had devoted them to her, to that sentiment of love, so new

and so sincere ; she had resumed her old existence, made so many visits, so many projects, and recommenced those odious struggles with her rivals. She had been surrounded by men, received their compliments with pleasure, and had displayed all her charms for others.

Already ! she had done all this already ! Later it might not have surprised him, he knew the world, women and sentiments ; and he could not have had those excessive exigencies nor these gloomy inquietudes. She was beautiful, born to please, to receive the homage and flattery of the world. Among them all she had chosen him ; she had given herself to him generously and royally. He must remain, yes, he would remain, the faithful servant of her caprices, and the resigned spectator of her gay life. But something within him suffered ; in that obscure cavern in the depths of the soul where the delicate sensibilities are hidden.

He was wrong, undoubtedly, and had always been wrong since he knew himself. He passed through the world with too much sentimental prudence ; the envelope of his soul

was too tender, and from this came that kind of isolation in which he had lived, through the fear of contact with the world. He was wrong, for these bruises come nearly always because we do not admit, and do not tolerate in others, a nature different from our own. He knew it, having often observed it, but he could not modify the vibrations particular to his being.

Indeed, he had nothing to reproach her for; if she had kept him far away from her drawing-room, and hidden in those days of happiness, it was to evade suspicion, to be his more assuredly afterward. Why, then, had this sadness entered his heart? Oh! why? It was because he had believed her to be entirely his, and he had just discovered that he could never seize and possess this woman who belonged to the world.

He well knew, moreover, that life is made up of "*almosts*," and until now he had been resigned to it, hiding his discontent and insufficient satisfactions under a voluntary unsociability. But he had thought that at last he would obtain the "*altogether*" so long expected and hoped for; but, alas! the "alto-

gether" is not of this world. The evening had been melancholy, and he consoled himself by reasoning on the painful impression he had experienced.

When he had gone to bed, this impression, instead of diminishing, only increased, and, as he never left anything unexplored, he searched for the origin of this new uneasiness in his heart. These doubts passed, came and went, like icy breaths, awakening in his love a, as yet, feeble pain, far away, but disquieting, like those vague neuralgic pains, given birth by a current of air, menacing the victim with horrible suffering.

He understood that he was jealous. Until he had seen her surrounded by men, he had ignored this sensation, although he had foreseen it somewhat; but he had supposed it different, much different, to what it would now become. He had supposed his mistress solely occupied with him in those days of secret and frequent rendezvous, during that period of first caresses that should have been all isolation and ardent emotion. He now refound her as much, and even more amused and interested, in all those ancient and futile

coquetries, than before the day she had given herself to him, and this wasting of her person to the first comer must leave but little of herself to the preferred one. He felt this jealousy more in the flesh than in the heart, not in a vague way, like an approaching fever, but in a precise way, for he doubted her.

First he doubted through instinct, through a sensation of doubt which ran in his veins, rather than in his thoughts, by that almost physical discontent of the man who is not sure of his mistress, and, after doubting thus, he began to suspect.

After all, what was he to her? A first lover or the tenth, the successor of M. de Burne, or the successor of Lamarthe, of Massival, of George de Maltry, and, perhaps, the predecessor of Count de Bernhaus. What did he know of her? That she was ravishingly pretty, more elegant, more intelligent and witty than all the rest, but changeable, soon wearied, fatigued, and disgusted; in love with herself, first of all, and an insatiable coquette.

Had she had a lover — or lovers — before him? If she had had none, would she have given herself to him so boldly? Where would

she have conceived the audacity to open the door of his chamber that night in a tavern? Would she, then, have been so easily induced to come to that cottage at Auteuil? Before consenting, she had simply asked those few questions that a prudent and experienced woman might have asked. He had answered circumspectly, like a man accustomed to these meetings, and she had immediately said "yes," satisfied and reassured, and probably experienced through former adventures.

With what discreet authority she had knocked at the little gate, behind which he awaited her with a faltering and beating heart! How she had entered without any visible emotion, her only preoccupation being to assure herself that she would not be recognized by the neighbors. How she had immediately felt at home in this cottage, rented and furnished for their secret meetings. Would a woman, however bold, indifferent to morals and disdainful of prejudices, have retained that calmness in entering her first rendezvous as a novice? Would she not have felt the mental troubles, physical hesitations, and the instinctive fear of footsteps treading un-

known ground, if she were not experienced in these excursions of love, and if the practice of these things had not already worn out her natural modesty ?

Enfevered by that irritating and intolerable fever that the pangs of the heart awaken in the silence of the night, Mariolle became agitated, dragged along by this chain of suppositions, like a man gliding down a declivity. From time to time, he tried to arrest the progress of his thoughts; he searched for, found and tasted reassuring reflections. But a germ of fear was within him, of which he could not foresee the issue.

However, what had he to reproach her ? Nothing but that she was not like him; did not understand life as he did, and had not in her heart a sensibility that responded to his own.

As soon as he awoke the following morning, the desire to see her, to strengthen his faith in her, by her near presence, grew on him like a thirst, and he awaited with impatience the time when he could present himself.

When she saw him entering the drawing-

room, where she was seated writing letters, she came toward him with her two hands extended.

“Ah! good morning, my dear friend!” said she, with an air of such sincere joy that all his odious thoughts, a shadow of which still floated in his mind, were evaporated.

He took a seat by her side, and told her of his changed love. He explained, with tender words, that there are two species of lovers: they who desire wildly, and whose ardor fades away on the day of triumph, and they whom the possession enslaves and captures, and in whom sensual love, mingled to the spiritual and inexpressible appeal that the heart of the man makes toward a woman, gives birth to the servitude of complete and torturing love.

Torturing indeed, and always, however happy he may be, for nothing satiates, even during the most intimate moments, the need of “Her,” which we carry within us.

Mme. de Burne listened, charmed, grateful, and exalted by his words; carried away, as when the actor plays his rôle powerfully, and when this rôle moves us by awakening an

echo in our own life. It was, indeed, an echo—the troubling echo of a sincere passion—but it was not within her that this passion cried out. She felt so pleased to have given birth to this sentiment, so pleased that it had been awakened in a man capable of expressing it thus, in a man who decidedly pleased her very much, and to whom she was really attached, and whom she needed more and more every day. Not, however, on account of her heart, but on account of that mysterious feminine being, so eager for love, homage, and conquests. She was so pleased that she felt a desire to embrace him, to offer him her lips, her whole self, that he might continue to worship her thus.

She answered without embarrassment and without prudery; with that tact with which certain women are gifted, telling him that he was dearer to her than ever before. And, as it chanced, no one called until twilight, they remained together, speaking of their love, caressing each other with words that did not have the same meaning to both hearts.

The lamps had just been lighted when Mme.

de Bratiane was announced. Mariolle took his leave, and, as Mme. de Burne accompanied him to the first drawing-room, he whispered:

“When shall I see you over there?”

“Shall we say Friday?” she suggested.

“Very well; what time shall I expect you?”

“At three o’clock, as usual,” she replied.

“Adieu, till Friday, then, my adored one,” said Mariolle.

During those two days of waiting that separated him from their rendezvous, he discovered a void in his heart he had never before experienced. Nothing existed for him but one woman. And as that woman was so near, and as only simple proprieties prevented him from joining her at every instant, or, of even living with her, he became exasperated in his solitude, in those interminable hours that glided by so slowly, in the absolute impossibility of a thing so easy.

On the next Friday he was at the rendezvous three hours too soon, but it relieved him to await there after so much mental suffering in waiting where she would never come.

He placed himself behind the gate long

before the so much longed-for three strokes of the clock, and, when he at last heard them, he trembled with impatience. The quarter struck; he opened the gate, and looked cautiously down the street. It was deserted from one end to the other. The minutes wore on with a torturing slowness, and he consulted his watch incessantly. When the hand reached the half-hour he had the impression that he had been standing in this place for an incalculable period. Suddenly he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and then the light knock on the gate made him forget his anguish, and moved him with gratitude toward her.

“Am I late?” she asked, breathless from her rapid walk.

“Not very,” he replied.

“Just imagine, I came near not coming at all. The house was full of people, and I did not know what to say to get rid of them,” said she, then added, “Do you bear your own name here?”

“No, but why do you ask?” said he.

“Because, if I should ever be unable to come, I could send you a message.”

“I call myself M. Nicolle,” he informed her.

“Very well, I will not forget it. How beautiful it is here !”

The flowers had been cultivated, multiplied and renewed by the gardener, who saw that his customer paid without a murmur for all that he could bring.

“Let us sit down a few moments here,” said she, as they reached a bench beside a vase of heliotropes, “and I will tell you a funny story,” she added, and she related a squabble which had just taken place.

It was said that Mme. Massival, the former mistress, and now the wife of the artist, exasperated by jealousy, had penetrated into Mme. de Bratiane’s drawing-room, while the marquise was singing, accompanied by the composer, and she had made a terrible scene. You can imagine the fury of the Italian, the surprise and delight of the guests.

Massival was frantic, and tried to drag his wife away, but she struck him in the face, tore his hair and beard. She clutched and held him motionless, while Lamarthe and two servants, who had been attracted by the noise, endeavored to release him.

Quiet was at last re-established by the departure of the husband and wife. Since then the musician has remained invisible, while the novelist, who had witnessed the scene, related it everywhere, in a very witty and amusing manner.

Madame de Burne was still much excited, and so preoccupied by the occurrence that nothing seemed to divert her thoughts, and the names of Massival and Lamarthe recurring incessantly to her lips, vexed Mariolle.

“And did you just hear of it?” he asked.

“Why, yes, scarcely an hour ago,” she answered.

“And that is why she is so late,” he thought, with bitterness, then added, aloud: “Shall we go in?”

“Certainly!” she murmured, absent-mindedly.

An hour later, when she had left him, for she was in a hurry, he returned to the solitary little cottage, and seated himself on a low chair near the window. In all his being, in all his soul, the impression that she had been no more his than if she had not come, had left a

dark void into which he looked. He saw nothing, he understood nothing. If she had not escaped his caresses, she had at least escaped the embrace of his heart, by a mysterious absence of the will to be his. She had not avoided him, but it seemed as if her heart had not come with her. It had remained somewhere, very far away, interested by other objects.

He then clearly saw that he loved her with his senses as much as with his soul, more perhaps. The deception of his useless caresses impelled him with a frantic desire to run after her, to bring her back. But why, of what use, since her thoughts were elsewhere that day? He must await the day and the hour when the whim of being loving would come to this absent mistress.

He returned to his apartments slowly, wearied and with heavy steps, his eyes fixed on the ground, and perfectly tired of life. And he remembered that they had appointed no other rendezvous, neither at her house nor elsewhere.

CHAPTER V.

UNTIL the beginning of the winter, she was almost faithful to their rendezvous. Faithful, but not punctual.

During the first three months she was always from one to two hours late. As the autumn rains forced Mariolle to await her behind the gate, with an umbrella over his head, his feet sinking in the mud, and shivering with cold, he had a little pavilion erected that he might not get hoarse at each of their meetings. The trees were now divested of their verdure, the roses had been replaced by hardier plants of all colors, filling the damp air, full of the melancholy odor of rain and dead leaves, with the balsamic and sad perfume of winter flowers. In front of the door were a profusion of rare plants, forming a large Maltese cross of delicate and varied shades, an invention of the gardener. And Mariolle never passed it without the thought that this blooming cross seemed to mark a grave.

He well knew these long waitings in the little pavilion. The falling rain would trickle against the walk and form a pool at his feet, and, at each station in this chapel of "waiting," the same reflections were in his mind, the same hopes, the same uneasiness, and the same discouragements.

It was an incessant warfare, an exhausting moral struggle, with something unattainable, with something that, perhaps, did not exist; the affections of a woman's heart.

What an odd thing this rendezvous had become. Some days she would come smiling, animated with the desire of conversation, and she would seat herself without removing her hat or gloves, without raising her veil and without even kissing him. At such times her head would be filled with a host of captivating preoccupations, more alluring than the desire of offering her lips to the kisses of a lover who was devoured by a hopeless ardor.

He would seat himself by her side, his heart filled with burning words that his lips could not utter; he would listen, trying to appear interested in what she was relating, and he would sometimes take one of her

hands, which she allowed him to retain almost without noticing it.

At other times she would appear more loving, but he would look at her with suspicious eyes, with the eyes of a lover who saw he was powerless to capture her whole heart, and understood that this relative affection was given him because her thoughts had not been diverted by anybody or anything else on those days.

Her constant delays, moreover, proved to Mariolle her growing indifference. We come with hasty step toward what we love, and what attracts us ; but it is always too soon to reach a place that possesses no charm, and anything will serve as a pretext to delay this vaguely tiresome meeting. A singular comparison always recurred to his mind. During the summer a desire for cold water made him accelerate his daily toilet, and hastened his step to the shower-bath, while during the cold weather he found so many little things to do before leaving home, that he always reached the bathing establishment an hour later than usual. Their rendezvous at Auteuil resembled those shower-baths for her.

Moreover, of late she frequently postponed their rendezvous until the next day, sending him a dispatch at the last minute, seeming to be always in search of pretexts, which she always found acceptable, but which threw him into moral agitations, in an intolerable physical nervous state.

Had she shown any coldness or any weariness of this ever-growing passion in him, he would perhaps have become irritated, then angry, then discouraged, and then appeased. But, on the contrary, she showed herself more attached, more flattered by his love, and more desirous of retaining it, without responding to it with anything but friendly preferences, that were beginning to excite the jealousy of her other admirers.

At her own house, she could not see him enough, and the same message that announced to André a postponement for Auteuil, always begged him to come and dine with her, or to spend a few hours in the evening. He had at first taken these invitations as compensations for his disappointment, for she must really love to see him, she must have need of him, of his tender words, of his loving

looks, of his enveloping affection, and of the discreet caresses of his presence. She needed him just as an idol, to become a true god, has need of prayer and faith. In her empty chapel she was but a piece of sculptured wood. But only one believer entered this sanctuary, adored, implored and trembled with fervor; she became the equal of Bramah or of Allah, for every loved being is a species of god.

More than any one else, Mme. de Burne felt herself born for the rôle of a fetich, for that mission given to woman, by being adored and pursued, of triumphing over men by beauty, charms and coquetry.

She was indeed that species of human goddess, delicate, disdainful, exacting and haughty, which the loving worship of men deify, and please like incense.

Nevertheless, she openly showed a lively predilection for Mariolle, without caring what might be said of it, and, perhaps, with a secret desire of inflaming and exasperating the others. He spent most of his life in her home; seated in a large arm-chair that Lamarthe called "The stall of the chosen one," and she experienced a sincere pleasure

in spending entire evenings with him, chatting and listening to him.

She was acquiring a taste for this intimacy, for this incessant contact with an agreeable and enlightened intelligence, which was now entirely her own, of which she was as much mistress as of the knickknacks on the table. She confided to him, by degrees, a great deal of herself, her thoughts, of her secret individuality, in those affectionate confidences that are as sweet to make as to receive. She felt more at ease, more sincere, with him than with any one else. She also felt this impression, dear to a woman, of giving into the keeping of some one, all that is disposable of her, which was something she had never done before.

This was a great deal for her, but to him it was very little. He awaited, he still hoped, for the grand indefinite rush of the being that gives its soul with its caresses.

Caresses, she considered useless, bothersome, and even painful. She submitted to them, was not insensible to them, but soon tired of them, and this lassitude no doubt awakened in her a sort of ennui.

When, at the close of his visits, he passionately kissed her neck at the roots of her golden hair, she always shrunk slightly from him; there was always an almost imperceptible contraction of the skin under the touch of these strange lips.

This shrinking from his touch was like a dagger in his heart, and he returned to his solitude deeply wounded in his affections. Why had she never had that period of ardor which comes to most women with the voluntary gift of themselves? True, it is sometimes of short duration, but it is seldom that it has not the existence of an hour or of a day. This mistress had not made a lover of him, but only an intelligent companion.

He did not complain, but he feared. He feared the one who would come suddenly; to-day or to-morrow perhaps. He might be an artist, a man of the world, an officer, or a strolling actor; it mattered not whom or what, but that he was born to please the eyes of women, and to please through no other reason than that he was *the one*; the one, who for the first time would penetrate her with the imperious desire of opening her arms to him.

He was now jealous of the future, as he had been of the unknown past; and all her intimate friends were becoming jealous of him in turn. They said a great deal among themselves, and even made indiscreet and obscure allusions before her. Some declared he was her lover, while others followed the opinion of Lamarthe, pretending that she was only amusing herself, as usual, by infatuating him and exasperating them; nothing more. Her father remonstrated, but she received his observations with haughty silence, and, by a curious contradiction of her prudence of a lifetime, the more this rumor spread the more openly she demonstrated her preference for Mariolle.

But he was disturbed by these remarks of suspicion, and spoke of them to her.

"I am not disturbed in the least," she replied.

"If you only truly loved me, at least," he remarked.

"And do I not love you, my friend?" said she, surprised.

"Yes, and no," he replied. "You love me well enough at your home, and badly else-

where. I should prefer the contrary for me, and also for yourself."

"We can only do what we can," she laughed.

"If you only knew," he resumed, "what agitations the efforts I make to animate you, cause me. I am sometimes oppressed by the thought that I am trying to reach the unattainable, to animate a block of ice that freezes me while melting in my arms."

She did not reply, for the subject was not pleasing to her; and she assumed that absent-minded air he had so often remarked at Auteuil.

He dared not insist. He looked on her as we do on those precious objects in museums that have such a great attraction for us, and yet cannot be touched too closely.

His days and nights continued to be so many hours of suffering for him, for he lived with this fixed idea, or, perhaps, more with the sentiment than with the idea, that she belonged to him without being his, was conquered, yet free, caught yet not captured. He lived around her, very near her, without ever getting to her; and he loved her with all the unresisting covetousness of his soul

and of his body. As he had done at the beginning of their *liaison*, he recommenced to write to her. With the assistance of ink he had stormed and taken the first defenses of her virtue ; with the aid of ink he would, perhaps, carry this last redoubt of secret resistance. He called less frequently, but repeated in his almost daily letters the inanity of his efforts of love.

From time to time, when he had been very eloquent, passionate, suffering, she had answered. His letters, dated at all hours of the night and of the early morning, were clear, concise, thoughtful, devoted, encouraging, and gloomy. She reasoned with him in an intelligent and even in an odd way. But, although he might re-read them and be convinced of the justice of her views, although he found them intelligent, well turned, and graceful, and although satisfying to his manly vanity, they did not content his heart. They were no more satisfying than the kisses given in those meetings at Auteuil.

He searched for the reason of all this. And by dint of reading and re-reading what she had written, he at last discovered it,

for it is always through their writing that we best understand people. Words dazzle and deceive, because they are mimicked by the features ; because we see them come from the lips, and these lips please us, and the eyes bewitch us. But words in black, on white paper, are the naked soul.

A man, through the artifices of rhetoric, through professional ability, through the habit of using the pen to treat of the affairs of life, often succeeds in disguising his true nature in his impersonal prose, useful or literary. But a woman seldom writes but to speak of herself, and she imparts a little of herself to each word. She does not know the artifices of style, and she gives herself entirely in the innocence of her expressions. He remembered the correspondences and the memoirs of celebrated women which he had read. How clearly defined were the affected, witty or sensible women. What struck him most in Mme. de Burne's letters was, that no sensibility was ever revealed. "That woman thinks, but does not feel," he said to himself, as he remembered other letters received by him. A little *bourgeoisie* whom he had met

traveling, and who had loved him for three months, had written him delicious little notes full of vibrating emotions. He had even been astonished by the suppleness of her thoughts, the elegance and variety of her phrases. Whence came this gift? From her susceptibility, no doubt. A woman does not write in those terms; it is direct emotion that constructs her expressions; she does not search out her words in the dictionary. When she feels her strength, she expresses herself clearly without trouble and without search, in the mobile sincerity of her nature.

He was now trying to penetrate the sincerity of his mistress' nature through the lines she had written. They were pleasant and clever. But could she find no more to say to him? Ah! he had found true words burning like ardent coals for her!

When his valet brought his mail to him in the morning he searched eagerly for the well-known writing, and, when he had found it, an involuntary emotion surged within him, followed by a violent beating of the heart. He would hasten to tear open the envelope. "What would she say to him?" Would the

word "love" be found in those lines? Never had she used that word without being followed by "well" — "I love you well" — "I love you very much" — "Do I not love you?" He knew all these formulas that expressed nothing through what has been added. Can any proportion exist in love? Can we judge whether we love well or badly? To love much is to love but little! We love, nothing more, nothing less. We cannot complete that. We can imagine nothing, we can say nothing, beyond that one word. It is short, but it is all; it becomes the body, the soul, the life, the entire being. We feel it as we feel the warmth of the blood, we breathe it as we do the air, we carry it within us as we carry the "thought," for it becomes the unique "thought." Nothing more exists but it.

It is not a word, it is an inexpressible state, represented by a few letters. Whatever we may say, we do nothing, we see nothing, we experience nothing, we suffer nothing — as we did before. Mariolle had become the prey of that little verb, and his eyes ran over the lines, searching in them the revelation of a

love like his own. He found many things that meant "she loves me well," but nothing to exclaim "she loves me!" She continued in her correspondence the pretty and poetic romance commenced at Mont-Saint-Michel. It was a literature of love, but it was not love.

When he had finished reading and re-reading them, he locked up these cherished papers in his desk.

Then her letters became fewer; she was no doubt tired of constructing phrases, and repeating the same thing. She was, moreover, traversing one of those periods of worldly agitations that André had foreseen, with that heartache which the smallest disagreeable incidents caused him.

It was a winter of fêtes. An intoxication of pleasure had invaded Paris. The fiacres and coupés rolled incessantly through the streets the whole night long. The contagion, like an epidemic of pleasure, had suddenly overcome all classes of society, and Mme. de Burne was one of its first victims.

She had achieved an immense success as a beauty at a ballet dance at the Austrian embassy. Count de Bernhaus had established

intimate relations between her and the ambassador, the Princess de Malten, who had been charmed by her new friend, and, through her, Mme de Burne had extended her relations with the nobility and the diplomatic world with great rapidity. Her grace, her charm, her elegance, her intelligence, and her rare wit, brought her quick triumphs. She soon became the rage, and the best titled women of France sought her drawing-room.

Every Monday a long line of carriages, blazing with armorial crests, were stationed along the sidewalks of the Rue du Général-Foy. The servants lost their heads, and confounded duchesses and marquises, countesses and baronesses, when calling out these high-sounding names at the door of the drawing-room.

She was completely enchanted by it all. The compliments, invitations and homage, the sensation of becoming one of those favored pets of society, one of the élite of whom all Paris was speaking, had awakened in her heart an acute attack of snobbishness.

This revolution brought about a close alliance among her former friends; the whole

clan of artists tried to struggle against it. Even Fresnol was accepted and enrolled in the ranks, and became a power among them. Mariolle was their chosen leader, for they acknowledged his ascendancy over her and the friendship she still felt for him.

But he looked on, and saw her vanishing in that worldly and flattering popularity, as a child who has broken the string of his balloon watches it disappear.

She seemed to be gliding away in the midst of this elegant and joyous throng, far away, very far from that great secret happiness that he had so much hoped for; and he was jealous of everybody, of all those men and women, and of everything. He detested the life she was leading, all the people whom she met, all the fêtes she attended, the balls, the concerts, and the theater; for all these took possession of her by parcels, absorbed her days and nights, and their intimacy was now limited to her few hours of liberty.

He became almost ill from the sufferings caused by his ferocious hatred, and he presented such a ghastly appearance when he called one day, that she asked:

“What is the matter with you? You look so pale; are you ill?”

“Yes, I am indeed ill,” he replied; “and my illness is that I love you too much.”

“We can never love too much, my friend,” she said, with a grateful look.

“What! and you admit that,” he exclaimed.

“Why, yes, and I believe it too,” she said.

“And you do not understand that I am dying through vain love of you,” he continued.

“First, you do not love me in vain. And, then, no one dies of love. Besides, all our friends are jealous of you, which proves that I do not treat you so very badly.”

“You do not understand me,” he said, taking her hand.

“Yes,” she replied, “I do; I understand you too well.”

“You, then, hear the despairing appeal my heart is incessantly pouring forth?”

“Yes, and I understand it.”

“And?” he interrupted.

“And it causes me a great deal of pain, for I love you enormously.”

“Then——”

“Then you cry out to me: ‘Be like me; think, feel, and express yourself as I do.’ But, my dear friend, I cannot. I am what I am. You must accept me as God made me. I have given myself entirely to you, and I do not regret it. I have no desire to be free, for you are dearer to me than any one else I know.”

“You do not love me!” he interrupted, despairingly.

“I love you with all the power of loving that is in me. If it is not different or greater, is it my fault?” she replied.

“If I were only sure of that, I would, perhaps, be contented,” he said.

“What do you mean by these words?” she asked.

“I mean that I believe you capable of loving otherwise, but I no longer believe myself capable of inspiring in you a veritable love.”

“No, no, my friend, you are mistaken. You are more to me than any one has ever been, and more than any one shall ever be—at least, I positively believe so. With you I have the great merit of not lying, of not sim-

ulating what you desire, when many women would do otherwise. Give me credit for it. Do not agitate yourself; have confidence in my affection, which is yours entirely and sincerely."

"Ah! what an odd way of understanding and talking of love!" he murmured, realizing how far apart they really were. "To you I am only some one whom you desire to have often seated beside you, but for me you fill the world. I see only you; I feel only you; I have need of no one but you."

"I know it, I believe it, and I understand it," she said, smiling radiantly. "I am enraptured by it, and say to you: Continue to love me always as you do now, if possible, for it is a great happiness to me; but do not force me to play a comedy which would be painful to me and unworthy of us both. I have felt this crisis coming for some time. It is very cruel to me, for I am profoundly attached to you; but I cannot bend my nature to make it similar to yours. Take me as I am."

"Have you ever thought, have you ever believed, even for a day, even for an hour,

that you could love me otherwise?" he asked, suddenly.

She was embarrassed, and reflected a few moments before answering. He was awaiting anxiously, and added:

"You see clearly, you see it well, that you also have dreamed of other things."

"I may have been mistaken in myself," she murmured, slowly.

"Oh! what psychologic wisdom!" he cried, "We cannot reason thus with the impulses of the heart."

She was still thinking, interested in her own thoughts, in this searching of her own heart, and finally said:

"Before I loved you as I do, I had for a time believed, in fact, that I might have for you more of —— more of —— more of enthusiasm ——, but, then, I would certainly have been less simple, less frank ——, perhaps less sincere later on."

"Why less sincere, later on?" he interposed.

"Because you inclose love in this formula, 'all or nothing!' and this 'all or nothing,' to my way of reasoning signifies, 'all now, and

nothing later on.' And it is when this nothing commences that a woman begins to dissimulate."

"But you do not understand my misery," he replied, agitatedly, "and the torture of the thought that you might have loved me otherwise. You have felt this; therefore it is another whom you shall love thus."

"I do not believe it," she said, unhesitatingly.

"And why? Yes, why? From the moment that you have the presentiment of love, that you are impressed by the suspicion of this torturing and unattainable hope of mingling your life, your soul, with that of another being, of disappearing in him, of becoming part of himself, you will then feel the possibility of this inexpressible emotion, and it will surely come to you some day or other, and you will then believe it."

"No; it was my imagination that deceived me. I have given you all that I can give. I have reflected a great deal on this since I became your mistress. Note that I fear nothing, not even words. Truly I am thoroughly convinced that I can love no

more, nor better, than I love you at this moment. You see that I speak to you as I speak to myself, and I do this because you penetrate everything, and it is better to hide nothing from you. It is the only means of linking ourselves closely, and for a long time. This is what I hope, my friend."

He listened, drinking in her words as a man dying of thirst, and he fell on his knees before her, kissed the two little hands, murmuring: "Thanks, my own beloved." When he raised his head to contemplate her, he saw two tears flowing down her cheeks; she then placed her arms around his neck, drew him gently toward her, and kissed him on both eyes.

"Sit down beside me," she said, quietly. "It is not prudent to kneel before me here."

After a few minutes of silence, during which they looked at each other lovingly, she asked him if he would some day conduct her to the expositions of the sculptor Prédolé, of whom everybody spoke with such enthusiasm.

She had a cupid in bronze by him, in her dressing-room; a charming little figure pour-

ing the water into the bath, and she wished to see the complete works of this delicious artist, who, for the last week, had been the rage in Paris.

They arranged the day, and then Mariolle arose to take his leave.

“ Shall we go to Auteuil to-morrow ? ” she asked, softly.

And he went away dazzled with happiness, and intoxicated by that “ perhaps ” which never dies in the loving heart.



CHAPTER VI.

MME. DE BURNE's coupé rolled along the pavement of the Rue Grenelle as fast as the two horses could trot. It was the last days of April, and the hailstones beat furiously against the panes of the carriage, and rebounded on the road, already covered by the white grains. The passers-by, under their umbrellas, hastened to seek more secure shelter. After two weeks of beautiful weather, that odious period of the last of winter again chilled and made everything shiver.

Her feet on a cask of boiling water, her form enveloped in furs, whose velvety and soft caresses warmed her body, and conveyed a delicious feeling to the delicate skin that feared contacts, the young woman was thinking painfully that, in an hour at most, she would have to take a fiacre and rejoin Mariolle at Auteuil.



A great desire to send him a dispatch took possession of her; but, then, she had promised herself, scarcely two months ago, that she would act thus as rarely as possible, for she was making a great effort to love him as he loved her.

When she had seen his suffering, she had been moved to compassion, and after that conversation, when she had kissed his eyes in an impulse of true emotion, her sincere affection for him had indeed become warmer and more expansive for a short time.

Surprised by her involuntary coldness, she had asked herself why she could not learn to love him as so many other women love their lovers, since she was so deeply attached to him, and since he pleased her more than any other man.

This indifference could only come from an indolence of the heart, and this could, no doubt, be conquered like all other indolences.

She tried, indeed. She tried to excite herself in thinking of him, to feel moved on the days of their rendezvous. She succeeded, sometimes, it is true, but as we succeed in

becoming frightened at night by thinking of burglars and apparitions.

She made great efforts, and even became animated a little in this passion, becoming more caressing, more loving. She succeeded quite well at first, making him delirious with joy.

Then she began to believe in a growing fever, somewhat similar to that which consumed him. Her old intermittent hope of love she had thought attainable, that night she had decided to give herself to him, when dreaming under the milky fogs of the night, on the shores of the Bay Saint Michel, reappeared, less seductive, less enveloped in ideal and poetic clouds, but more precise, more natural, and free of illusions, after the trial of their *liaison*.

She had then called, and watched in vain, for that violent impulse of the entire being toward another, born, it is said, when the bodies, dragged on by the emotions of the soul, have been united. But that impulse had never come.

She became obstinate in simulating affection ; multiplying the rendezvous, and saying

to him, frequently: "I feel that I love you more and more." But a weariness soon invaded her, and she felt her inability to deceive herself and him much longer. She remarked, with astonishment, that his kisses importuned her, although she was not quite insensible to them. This she knew by that vague lassitude that took possession of her on those days she was to meet him there. Why was it, that, on such mornings, she did not feel moved by the expectation and desire of his embraces, like many other women might? She accepted them resignedly, and that was all. Was it that her flesh was so delicate, so exceptionally aristocratic and refined, that it still retained a hidden modesty; the modesty of a superior animal, ignored by her modern soul.

Mariolle came to understand this, little by little, as he saw this fictitious ardor decreasing. He understood her devoted efforts, and an inconsolable grief glided into his heart.

Now she had tried the experiment, and they both knew it was hopeless; and even now she shuddered under her warm furs, and

could not find the courage to leave her comfortable carriage, and enter a cold fiacre to rejoin her poor lover.

The idea of breaking off and avoiding his caresses did not for a moment enter her head. She knew that to entirely captivate a man and keep him for herself only, in the midst of rivals, she had to make sacrifices, that was undeniable. Besides, she wished to remain loyal to him. But why should she visit their rendezvous so often? Would it not acquire a greater charm and a new attraction if she were not so liberal with her visits?

She always went to Auteuil with the impression that she was making him a most precious offering, an inestimable gift, and she always felt the sensation of sacrifice. It was more the satisfaction of feeling herself generous than the happiness of being his.

She even calculated that André's love would be more durable if she were not so generous, for all hunger is increased by fast. As soon as this resolution was taken she decided that she would go to Auteuil, but would feign an indisposition. And now that this

determination was taken, she again smiled to herself.

Nevertheless, for the first time, this meeting with a fixed hour, arranged the previous day like a business rendezvous or a medical consultation, assumed a somewhat vulgar appearance. After a long and unexpected tête-à-tête, there is nothing more natural than this kiss which springs from the charm of tender and affectionate words. But how different was this kiss without surprise, announced beforehand, that she went to receive once a week, with her watch in her hand. It was true that some days, when she was not to meet him, she felt a vague desire to go to him, while this desire never made its appearance when she had to join him with the ruses of a tracked criminal, suspicious roundabouts, in a filthy fiacre, and her mind distracted by all those disagreeable things.

Ah ! that hour at Auteuil ! She had calculated it on the clocks of all her friends, she had seen it approach minute by minute, when in Mme. de Frémines' drawing-room, or, perhaps, in conversation with Mme. de Bratiane or the beautiful Mme. Le Prieur, when

she had to await the hour outside of her home, that an unexpected visitor or an unforeseen obstacle might not detain her.

She suddenly said to herself: "I shall make a holiday of it to-day, and not go until late." Then she opened a sort of invisible little placard hidden in the front of the coupé under the black silk with which the carriage — a veritable boudoir of a young woman — was wadded. When the two little doors of this hiding-place had been pushed aside, there appeared a mirror, which she raised and revealed behind it several small silver objects; a box of *poudre-de-riz*, a crayon for the lips, two bottles filled with perfume, an ink-bottle, pens, scissors, and a paper-cutter, which she often used to cut the leaves of the latest novel she read on the way. There was also an exquisite clock, small and round as a golden nut, and this now marked the hour of four.

"I have still an hour at least," thought Mme. de Burne, and she touched a button to signal the footman that she wished to give him orders through the acoustic tube, then, placing her lips to the crystal mouthpiece, she said, simply :

“To the Austrian embassy.”

She then glanced at herself in the mirror, with that smile of satisfaction we always feel when we look at the person we love best, then she opened her furs to see that her dress was not disordered. It was an elegant winter toilet, the neck trimmed with fine white feathers, extending quite low down the shoulders, and the color deepening to a light gray, like the wing of a bird. Her whole form seemed entwined in this downy border, giving her the odd appearance of a wild bird. On her hat, a sort of toque, were feathers of more lively colors, and her pretty little blonde figure seemed ready to fly away with the water-fowl toward the sky, in the midst of this shower of hail.

She was still contemplating herself, when the carriage turned abruptly under the large door of the Austrian embassy. She rearranged her furs, lowered the mirror, reclosed the little doors, and, when the coupé had stopped, she first turned to her coachman, saying: “You may return home; I shall not need you.” Then, turning to the footman, who was coming down the steps, she asked:

“Is the princess at home?”

“Yes, madame,” he replied.

She entered, ascended the stairs, and was ushered into a very small parlor, where the Princess de Malten was writing letters.

Seeing her friend, the ambassadress arose, with an air of great delight, and they kissed each other affectionately twice, on the cheeks and on the lips.

They seated themselves close together near the fire. They loved each other very much, pleased and understood each other on all points, for they were similar, of the same feminine race, had expanded in the same atmosphere, and were gifted with the same sensations, although Mme. de Malten was a Swede married to an Austrian. They exercised a mysterious and singular attraction for each other, and from this sprung an agreeable feeling of contentment whenever they found themselves together. They would chat during entire half-days without interruption, interested both by the simple attractions of the same tastes their conversation revealed.

“See how much I love you,” said Mme. de Burne; “you dine with me this evening, and

I could not abstain from coming to see you this afternoon. It is a passion with me, my dear."

"I share it with you," replied the princess, smiling.

And thus through a professional habit of coquetry, they complimented each other. Mme. de Burne, while conversing, did not forget to consult the clock frequently. Five o'clock was now striking; he had now been waiting over there an hour. "It is enough," she thought, as she arose.

"Going so soon?" exclaimed the princess.

"Yes, I must hurry, for I am expected," said Mme. de Burne, adding, "I should much prefer, however, to remain with you."

They again kissed each other, and Mme. de Burne entered a hired fiacre.

The horse was lame, dragging the vehicle along painfully, and this lameness, this weariness of the animal, the young woman felt also within her. She found the road long and dreary, then she tried to console herself with the thought that she was to see André, but the dreariness of the journey soon again overcame her.

She found him shivering behind the gate. The hail was still blowing through the trees, as they walked toward the cottage with their feet sinking into the mud at every step.

The garden was sad, desolate and dreary, and André was pale and miserable.

“Mercy! how cold it is,” she exclaimed, as they entered.

A blazing fire was burning in the grate, but, as it had only been started at noon, it had not yet dried the damp, cold walls.

“I think I shall keep on my furs,” she said, shudderingly.

She opened them slightly, however, appearing like an emigrating bird, which always flies away to warmer climates, in her feathery dress.

“I am to have a charming dinner this evening,” she resumed.

“Who is to be there?” he asked, seating himself by her side.

“Why—you, of course; then Prédolé, whom I have so long wanted to know.”

“Ah! you will have Prédolé,” he interposed.

“Yes, Lamarthe is to bring him.”

“But this Prédolé is not a man that you will like,” Mariolle said. “Sculptors, in general, are not made to please pretty women, and Prédolé, in particular, much less even than others.”

“Oh! my dear friend, that is impossible, I admire him so much!” she exclaimed.

For the past two months, that is, since his exposition in the Galerie Varin, the sculptor Prédolé had conquered Paris. He had been highly appreciated before this, and it had often been said that he made delicious little statues. But when artists and connoisseurs had been called upon to judge his entire works, in the gallery of the Rue Varin, there was an explosion of enthusiasm.

It seemed like the revelation of a hitherto unknown charm; a gift so original in portraying elegance and grace that it seemed like assisting at the birth of a new charm of form. He had adopted for a specialty those very lightly draped statuettes, revealing the hidden and delicate curves with unequaled perfection.

His *danseuses* especially, of which he had made numerous studies, showed, in their

gestures and in their poses, by the harmony of attitudes and of movements, all that the feminine form harbors of suppleness and rare beauty.

Mme. de Burne had made incessant efforts to attract him to her house, but the artist was very unsociable, even somewhat of a bear, it was said, and, until now, her efforts had been in vain. Through the intervention of Lamarthe, however, who had proclaimed his merits everywhere, she had at last succeeded in capturing the sculptor.

"Who else will you have?" suddenly asked Mariolle.

"The Princess de Malten," she replied.

"And who else?" said he, displeased, for he did not like the princess.

"Massival, Bernhaus and George de Maltry, that is all," she replied, then added, "You know Prédolé, do you not?"

"Yes, slightly."

"What do you think of him?" she asked.

"I think him charming," he answered.

"He is the man the most in love with his art that I have ever met, and the most interesting when he speaks of it."

“How delightful!” she exclaimed.

He had taken her hand from under her furs, and, as he kissed it, she suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to complain of illness, so she murmured :

“How cold it is ; I am chilled to the bone.”

He arose and looked at the thermometer, which, in fact was very low. He reseated himself at her side, and she repeated :

“Heavens ! how cold it is.”

For the past three weeks he had noticed that at each of their meetings she found some pretext to repulse his affections. He knew that she must be weary of this hypocrisy that she could no longer continue. And he was himself so exasperated by his helplessness, so devoured by a vain desire and his madness for this woman that he often said, in his hopeless solitude : “I prefer a rupture than to live on thus.”

“I must go,” she said, rising, “or I will take cold,” then added, “Had I not been so anxious to see you, I would not have ventured out.”

As he did not speak, being too full of

anguish, she continued, "After the warm weather we have had for the last two weeks, the damp days are dangerous."

She was looking out into the garden, where the trees were almost green under their covering of half melted snow, and he was looking at her, thinking:

"And this is her love for me," then a sort of hatred and rage entered his heart. "She is cold because she is with me," he went on thinking. "If it were for one of those stupid caprices that agitate the useless existence of these futile creatures, she would brave anything, even risk her life. Had she not often been out in her open carriage on the coldest days, only to show her toilets? Ah! they are all the same."

He was looking at her, and understood that this tête-à-tête was tiresome to her, and that she was impatient to go.

Could it be true that there ever had existed, and still existed, affectionate women who were thrilled by emotion, who suffered, wept, loved, with lips and eyes that speak, with a heart that beats, with a hand that caresses, women who brave everything because they

love, and who will go, day or night, panting and intrepid, though watched and threatened, toward the one whose arms are awaiting to enfold them?

Oh! what a terrible love was this that enchained him, a love without issue, without end, without joy and without triumph; that only enervated, exasperated and devoured him with anxiety, a love without sweetness and without delight, causing only regrets and sufferings, and never revealing the rapture of shared caresses, only through the intolerable regret of kisses impossible to awaken on cold lips, sterile and dry as dead trees.

“Your dress is very pretty,” he said, not wishing to speak of his torture.

“Reserve your compliments until you see what I shall wear this evening,” she laughed, and then coughing slightly, added: “Indeed; I must go, my friend, for I am taking cold. The sun will return soon, and I shall return with it.”

He did not insist; he was discouraged. Knowing that no effort could now overcome the inertia of this being without impulse,

that it was all over, it was useless to hope any longer, to await tender words from those cold lips, or a look of love from those calm eyes. A determined resolution to escape from this torturing tyranny suddenly took possession of him. She had nailed him to a cross, and she looked on his agony without understanding his suffering, delighted, even, that she had caused it. But he would tear himself away, even if he left behind him shreds of his flesh and of his torn heart. He would escape like a wild beast pursued by hunters; he could hide in solitude, where he might, perhaps, heal his mutilated heart.

“Adieu, then,” said he, sadly.

“I shall see you this evening, my friend,” she said, struck by the sadness of his tone.

“This evening,” he repeated. “Adieu.”

She was gone. He returned alone, and stood by the fireplace.

Alone ! How cold it was, in fact ! And what sadness now overcame him. It was all over. Ah ! what a horrible thought ! All was over, hopes, waitings, his dreams of her, with that flame in his heart which brightens

our gloomy life, by moments, bonfires like started on an obscure night.

Adieu to those nights of solitary emotion, spent in walking up and down his chamber, thinking of her; and those awakenings, when, on opening his eyes, he would say: "I shall see her, by-and-by, in our little cottage."

How he loved her! How he loved her! How long and painful the cure would be! She had gone because it was cold! He still saw her standing there, looking at him and bewitching him—bewitching him that she might the better wound his heart. Ah! indeed, she had now broken it, with a single and vital blow. He felt the wound—it was already an old wound—reopened, and then healed by her kindness; but she had made this last wound incurable, stabbing him as if with a dagger of her evident indifference.

His grief was choking him, and he covered his face with his hands, as if to hide his own weakness from himself, and he wept. She had gone because it was cold! He would have walked barefooted in the snow to meet her; he would have thrown himself from the roof only to fall at her feet.

An old legend came back to his mind, that of the "hill of the two lovers," seen on the way to Rouen: A young girl, obeying the cruel caprice of her father, who had forbidden her to wed her lover unless she succeeded in carrying him to the summit of a rugged mountain. She had carried him there by crawling on her hands and knees, and had died on reaching the summit. Love was, then, only a legend — made to sing in verses, or to relate in deceiving romances.

Had not his mistress told him, in one of their first meetings, something he had never forgotten. "The men of the present," she had said, "do not love the women of to-day enough to harm them. Believe me, I know the one and the other." She had been mistaken in him, but not in herself, for she had added: "In any case I warn you that I am truly incapable of loving any one, whoever he may be."

Whoever he may be? It was certainly not himself, he was sure of that now, but another.

She could never love him! And why?

Then the sensation of having missed every-

thing in life, a sensation he had long felt, overcame him. He had done nothing, succeeded in nothing, obtained nothing, conquered nothing. The arts had tempted him, but he had never had the necessary courage or perseverance to triumph in them. No success had ever rejoiced him, no taste for a beautiful thing had ever exalted or ennobled him. His only energetic effort to conquer the heart of a woman had just failed like all the rest. He was, after all, but a failure.

He still wept, the bitterness of his tears augmenting his misery.

When he at last raised his head, it was night; he had barely time to return home and dress to dine with her.



Florence

CHAPTER VII.

ANDRÉ Mariolle was the first arrival in Mme. de Burne's drawing-room. He contemplated the walls around him ; those hangings, knick-knacks and furniture he had so cherished because they were hers ; all those familiar objects, in the midst of which he had known her, where he had learned to love her, where he had discovered and felt that passion growing within him day by day until the hour of his useless victory. With what emotion he had often awaited her in these coquettish surroundings ; a delicate frame to an exquisite being. How well he knew the tender perfume that filled the atmosphere of this room ; a sweet odor of fleur-de-lis, refined and simple. There he had shuddered in expectation, trembled with hopes, experienced all emotions, and, later, had felt all the anguishes of the heart. He would have wished that no one should come ; to remain there alone through the night, dreaming of his love, as

we watch by the dead. Then he would have gone forth at sunrise, perhaps never to return.

The door opened, and she entered, with her hand extending toward him, and it was by a great effort that he controlled his feelings. It was not a woman, but an exquisite living bouquet.

A belt of pinks encircled her waist, and descended in a cascade to her feet. Around her bare arms and shoulders was a wreath of myosotis and lilies of the valley, while three fairy-like orchids seemed to bloom from her throat, and caressed the white skin with their rosy hue. In her blonde hair shone enameled violets, sprinkled with miniature diamonds. Other brilliants, trembling on golden pins, sparkled like drops of water in the perfumed decorations of her bodice.

“I will have a headache,” she said, smiling ; “but that cannot be helped. It is so becoming.”

She looked like a garden in the springtime ; she was fresher than her wreaths. André looked at her dazzled, and thinking that it would be as brutal and barbarous to take her

in his arms at this moment, as to crush blooming flowers under his feet.

The body of a woman had become only a pretext for adornment, an object for decoration ; it was no longer an object for love. She resembled flowers, birds, and a thousand other things as much as she resembled a woman. Women of past generations employed coquettish arts to aid their beauty, but they tried first of all to please by the direct charm of their body, by the natural power of their graces, by the irresistible attraction that the feminine form exercises on the hearts of men. To-day coquetry was everything, artifice had become the great means, and also the aim, for they even used it in preference, to irritate the eyes of their rivals, to lash their jealousy, and for the conquest of men. To what end was this toilet destined ? the admiration of her lover or the humiliation of the Princess de Malten ?

At this moment the princess was announced. Mme. de Burne rushed toward her, carefully protecting the orchids, however, and kissed her with a great show of

affection. It was a pretty kiss, given and returned heartily by both.

Mariolle shuddered with anguish. She had never rushed to him with such an impetuosity, never kissed him so heartily, and by a sudden revulsion of thought, he said to himself, furiously, "These women are not made for us."

Massival was now announced ; then M. de Pradon, Comte de Bernhaus, and George de Maltry, resplendent in a coat of the latest English cut, soon followed.

They now awaited only Lamarthe and Prédolé, and in the meantime the sculptor was praised by everybody.

"He had resuscitated the grace ; refound the tradition of the renaissance, with something more, modern sincerity." According to George de Maltry, "he was the exquisite delineator of human suppleness." These were the phrases that had been repeated from mouth to mouth, from salon to salon, for the past two months.

He appeared at last, and was a surprise. He was a big man, of uncertain age, with the shoulders of a peasant, a strong head, with accentuated features, covered with gray hair

and beard, a powerful nose, thick lips and an air of timidity and embarrassment. He carried his arms somewhat far from his body, with a sort of awkwardness, which, no doubt, was attributable to his enormous hands. They were large, thick, with muscular and hairy fingers, and they seemed ungainly, slow, embarrassed by being there, and impossible to hide.

But the face was brightened by a pair of limpid and piercing gray eyes, of extraordinary vivacity. They alone seemed alive in this heavy man; they looked, scrutinized, searched, taking in everything in their sharp and rapid glances. And one felt that a great and lively intelligence animated this curious gaze.

Madame de Burne, somewhat disappointed, politely indicated a seat in which the artist sunk heavily. Then he remained there motionless, confused, seeming very ill at ease in these surroundings.

Lamarthe, who was never at a loss, came to the rescue and broke the ice.

“My dear Prédolé,” said he, “I will show you where you are; now that you have seen our divine hostess, you must see her surroundings.”

He pointed out an authentic bust of Houdon, on the chimney, then leading him in front of the secretary of Boules, showed him something by Clodion, two women dancing, with their arms entwining each other; and finally brought him to a *étagère* on which stood four Tanagra statuettes, chosen from among the most perfect.

Prédolé's face lighted up at once, as if he had refound his children in the desert. He walked straight to the antique little figures, and, as he seized two of them in those formidable hands, Mme. de Burne trembled for their safety. But his touch on them seemed a caress, for he handled them with a suppleness and a surprising delicacy, turning them in his thick fingers, now become as deft as those of a juggler. To see him contemplating and caressing them, one felt that, in the soul and hands of this big man, there was a unique, ideal and delicate tenderness for all these exquisite little things.

"Do you think them pretty?" asked Lamarthe.

Then the sculptor praised as if congratulating them, and he spoke of them as the most

remarkable he had seen, using few words, in a somewhat low but assuring voice, showing that he well knew the value of the terms, and expressing his thoughts clearly.

Then, still under the guidance of the novelist, he inspected the other rare knickknacks that Mme. de Burne had collected, guided by the advice of her friends. He greeted them with exclamations of joy and astonishment in discovering them in such a place, turning them delicately in his hands as if to bring himself in loving contact with them. A bronze statuette, hidden in an obscure corner, and which was as heavy as lead, next caught his attention; he took it up in one hand, brought it near one of the lamps, admired it for a long time, then returned it to its place without any visible effort.

"Is not that fellow built to struggle against marble and stone?" laughed Lamarthe.

By the time dinner was announced, they were all admiring him.

Mme. de Burne took the arm of the sculptor, and, when they had reached the dining-room, she made him seat himself at her right.

"Your art, monsieur, has also another

merit, has it not, that of being the most ancient?" asked Mme. de Burne, as courteously as if interrogating the heir of a great family on the exact origin of his name.

"Indeed, madame," he answered, quietly, "the Biblical shepherds played the flute; therefore music appears more ancient, although, to our understanding, true music does not date so far back. But true sculpture dates from a very long distance."

"You love music?" she rejoined.

"I love all the arts," he answered, gravely.

"Is the inventor of yours known?" she again asked.

He reflected; then, in softened accents, as if relating a tender story, he said :

"According to the Hellenic tradition, it was the Athenian Dedale, but the prettiest legend is that which attributes this discovery to a potter of Sicyone, named Dibutades. His daughter, Kora, having sketched the shadow of her lover's profile, her father filled this silhouette with clay, and modeled it. My art was then born."

"Charming," murmured Lamarthe; then, after a short silence, added:

“Ah ! if you only would, Prédolé !” Then, addressing Mme. de Burne :

“You can never imagine, madame, how interesting this man can be when he speaks of what he loves, how well he can express it, demonstrate it, and make us worship it.”

But the sculptor did not seem disposed to pose or discourse. He had already tucked a corner of his napkin under his collar, and he was eating away with that meditative look, that sort of respect that peasants have for their soup.

When he had finished he drank a glass of wine, and then looked around, seeming more at his ease, and acclimatized.

From time to time he tried to turn, that he might see a modern group placed on the chimney behind him, and which he saw reflected from a mirror. He did not know it, and was trying to guess its author ; but, finally, he could stand it no longer, and suddenly exclaimed:

“It is by Falguieres, is it not?”

“Yes ; it is by Falguieres,” laughed Mme. de Burne. “How could you recognize it in a mirror ?”

“ Ah ! madame,” he said, smiling in his turn, “ I always recognize at a glance the sculptures of people who do any painting, and the paintings of people who also do some sculpture. It does not at all resemble the work of a man who practices one art exclusively.”

Lamarthe, who wished to draw him out, asked for explanations, and the sculptor continued.

He defined and characterized the paintings of the sculptors, and the sculptures of the painters, in a manner so clear, original and new, with the words so slow and precise, that they listened to him with their eyes as well as with their ears. He went back to the early history of art for his demonstrations; and, giving examples from epoch to epoch, he ascended to the first Italian masters, painters and sculptors at the same time—Nicolas and Jean de Pise, Donatello and Lorenzo Ghiberti. He indicated the curious opinions of Diderot on the same subject; and to conclude, he cited the doors of the baptismal font of Saint Jean de Florence, by Ghiberti, bas-reliefs so life-like and dramatic that they resembled painted canvas.

With his heavy hands agitated before him, as if they were filled with modeling material, and which had now become so light and supple in their movements as to charm the eye, he reconstructed the works he related with so much conviction, that they followed his fingers with curiosity, while he evoked all the images expressed by his lips, above the glasses and plates.

Then, being offered something of which he was very fond, he became silent, and returned to his dinner.

He spoke very little during the rest of the dinner, scarcely paying any attention to the conversation, which had now become general, and jumped from the echo of a theater to a political rumor, from a ball or a marriage to an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. He ate and drank well without being affected by the wine, his thoughts being clear, difficult to disturb, and scarcely excitable.

When they had returned to the drawing-room, Lamarthe, who had not obtained all he expected from the sculptor, called his attention to a glass case, under which was an object of inestimable value: a silver ink-stand,

a quoted, classed and historical piece, chiseled by Benvenuto Cellini.

A sort of rapture took possession of the sculptor. He contemplated it as if looking on the face of a mistress, and, seized with admiration, he expressed ideas as graceful and delicate on this work of Cellini, as the art of this divine chiseler itself. Then, feeling that they were listening to him, he seated himself in an arm-chair and abandoned himself entirely to his admiration, holding and regarding incessantly the jewel he had just discovered. He related his impressions of all the marvels of art known to him, and rendered visible the strange intoxication that the grace of forms caused. his soul, entering through his eyes.

During ten years he had wandered over the world looking at nothing but marble, stone, bronze and wood, sculptured by loving hands ; or at gold, silver, ivory and copper, vague materials transformed into works of art under the fairy fingers of chiselers.

And he, himself, was achieving works of art while talking ; with surprising reliefs, and

delicious models obtained by the accuracy of his words.

The men were all surrounding him, listening with evident interest, while the two women, seated near the fire, seemed bored, and were conversing in a low voice, disconcerted to see themselves neglected to listen to simple contours of objects.

When Prédolé had ended, Lamarthe, who was charmed, pressed his hand, and, in a voice softened by the emotion of a love in common, said:

“Really, my dear friend, I feel like embracing you; you are the only artist, the only passionate and the only great man of to-day, the only man who truly loves what he does, who finds happiness in it, and who is never wearied nor disgusted with it. You handle art in its purest, most simple, its highest and most inaccessible form. You give birth to the beautiful by the curve of a line, and you care not for other things. I drink this glass of wine to your health.”

Then the conversation became general but languishing, choked by the ideas that had

floated through the atmosphere of this pretty salon filled with precious objects.

Prédolé excused himself early, saying he went to work every morning at sunrise.

“Well, how do you like him?” asked Lamarthe, full of enthusiasm, when he had gone.

“He is interesting enough, but tiresome,” answered Mme. de Burne, discontentedly.

The novelist smiled, and thought to himself: “Indeed, it is true he did not admire your toilet, and you are the only knickknack that he scarcely looked at.” But aloud he uttered a few compliments, and then went and took a seat beside the Princess de Malten.

The Count de Bernhaus approached the mistress of the house, and sank down on a small ottoman at her feet. Mariolle, Massival, Maltry and M. de Pradon were still speaking of the sculptor, who had made a deep impression on them. M. de Maltry compared him to the old masters, whose whole lives had been embellished and brightened by the exclusive and devouring love of the manifestations of “beauty,” and he philosophized on this with subtle, just, and tiresome phrases.

Massival, soon wearied of listening to the praises of an art which was not his own, approached Madame de Malten and Lamarthe, but the latter soon left them to rejoin the other men.

“ Shall we go,” he said to Mariolle ?

“ Yes ; I am quite ready,” was his answer.

The novelist loved to talk on the street when walking with any one at night. His abrupt, sarcastic and cutting tones seemed to catch and climb up the walls of the houses. He felt himself eloquent and clairvoyant, intelligent and witty, in these nocturnal tête-à-têtes, when he soliloquized rather than conversed. In this he had obtained successes that sufficed him, and he prepared himself a good night's sleep by this slight fatigue of lungs and of limbs.

Mariolle could bear no more. All his misery, all his unhappiness, all his grief, all irremediable deceptions, boiled in his heart since he had entered this house.

He could bear it no longer, and he would go never to return.

When he took his leave of Mme. de Burne,

she said good night with a very absent-minded air.

The two men were at last alone in the street. The wind had turned, and it was now warm as a spring night. The sky was filled with stars, and vibrated as if in that immense space a breath of summer had enlivened the sparkling of the stars.

“What a fortunate man that Prédolé is,” said Lamarthe, suddenly. “He loves but one thing — that is his art. He thinks of nothing else, lives for nothing else, and it fills, consoles, enlivens and makes the happiness of his existence. He is truly a great artist of the old race. Ah ! he troubles himself but little with women ; those women adorned and disguised. Did you see what little notice he took of those two pretty women, who were indeed very charming ? But he must have pure plastics, he will have nothing artificial, so our divine hostess pronounced him unbearable and stupid. For her a bust of Houdon, a statuette of Tanagre, or an inkstand of Benvenuto are only so many little ornaments necessary to the natural and rich frame of a masterpiece which is herself ; herself and her

dress, for her dress is part of herself; it is the new note she gives each day to her beauty. Ah! how futile and selfish a woman it."

He stopped and struck the sidewalk with his cane with such a sudden stroke that it was echoed through the street, then he continued:

"They know, understand, and prize all that gives them value, the toilet and the jewel, whose style changes every ten years; but they ignore that which demands a rare and constant selection, that which exacts a great and delicate artistic penetration, and a purely disinterested and esthetic exercise of their senses. Their senses are, moreover, very rudimentary, little perfected, inaccessible to all that does not directly touch feminine egotism, which absorbs everything in them; their tact is that of traps and war. They are even almost powerless to taste the material delights of inferior order, which demand a physical education and the cultivated attention of one organ, like gluttony. When, as a few exceptions sometimes do, they reach that point that they can respect a good *cuisine*, they still remain incapable of

understanding those old wines that speak only to the palate of men; for wine speaks."

He struck the pavement again with his cane, to emphasize his words, and give point to his phrase.

"However, we must not expect too much of them," he continued. "But this absence of taste and comprehension, which obscures their intellectual view in elevated things, often blinds them even more in regard to us. Formerly, a man was judged by his valor and courage, but intelligence, qualities and exceptional merits are now useless to them. Women of to-day are but players, the itinerant players of love, repeating, through habit, a comedy they play through tradition, and which they do not believe."

They walked on a few minutes in silence, side by side. Mariolle had listened to him attentively, repeating his phrases mentally, and approving them in his misery. He knew, moreover, that a sort of Italian adventurer, Prince Epilati, a gentleman of arms, whose elegance and vigor formed the topic of conversation just now, had lately monopolized

the attention and coquetry of the little Baroness de Frémines.

“It is our own fault,” said Mariolle. “We choose badly; there are other women than those !”

“The only ones capable of love,” resumed the novelist, “are the shop-girls or the sentimental little bourgeois, who are poor and badly married. They are overflowing with sentiment, but of sentiment so vulgar that to exchange it with ours would be to bestow alms. Therefore, I say, that, in our young, wealthy society, where women are not in need of anything, and whose only desires are to be amused without running any risk, where men have their determined pleasure like their work—I repeat, that the old, charming and powerful natural attractions that drew the different sexes toward each other, have disappeared.”

“That is true,” murmured Mariolle.

His desire to fly had increased; to fly far away from those dolls, who, through sheer idleness, mimicked the beautiful and tender passion of other days, and who tasted none of its lost flavor.



“Good night,” said he, as he reached his door. “I shall go to bed.”

As soon as he reached his room, he wrote the following:

“Adieu, madame. Do you remember my first letter? I was saying adieu then; but I did not go, and I was wrong. But when you receive this, I shall have left Paris. Need I explain why? Men like myself should never meet women like you. If I were an artist, and could express my emotions in a way that might relieve me, you might have thought I had some merit; I am only a poor fellow whose love has become an atrocious and intolerable distress. When I met you I did not believe myself capable of feeling and suffering thus. Another in your place might have poured a divine delirium into my heart and made it live. But you have only tortured it. It was not your fault, I know, and I do not reproach you. I have not even the right to write these lines, but you will forgive me. You do not feel as I feel, you cannot even understand what passes within me when I am with you, when you are speaking to me, and I am gazing on you. Yes, you consent,

you accept me, and you offer me a peaceful and reasonable happiness, for which I should thank you on my bended knees. But I will have none of it. Ah! what a horrible and torturing love is that which begs incessantly for a tender word or a loving caress, but never receives it! My heart is as empty as the stomach of that beggar who ran so long behind you with extended hand. You threw him some beautiful things, but no bread. It is bread, it is love, that I must have. I go miserable and poor, poor in your love, a few crumbs of which would have saved me. I have nothing left in the world but a cruel thought which clings to me and that must be killed. That is what I shall try to do.

“Adieu, madame, I thank you and crave your pardon. I still love you with all my soul. Adieu, madame.

“ANDRÉ MARIOLLE.”



PART III.

CHAPTER I.

THE morning was beautiful and bright as Mariolle entered the carriage awaiting him at the door. His valet had, during the night, prepared and packed all things necessary for a long absence. The only address he left was, "Fontainebleau poste restante." He took no one with him, that nothing should remind him of Paris, and that he should hear no familiar voice in his solitude.

"To the Gare de Lyon!" he cried out to his coachman, who immediately whipped up his horses, and they were on the way. His other departure from Paris for Mont-Saint-Michel, the previous summer, came back to his thoughts. It was not yet a year ago, and he was now flying from her.

The carriage was soon in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, now bathed in the spring sunlight. The green leaves, scarcely injured by the last two days of hail and frost, seemed to expand in this bright morning. An odor of fresh verdure, and of sap evaporated by the sprouting of future branches, filled the air. It was one of those mornings when we feel that the public gardens, and the chestnut trees along the avenues, will bloom in one day through Paris like chandeliers that are suddenly lighted. The earth was coming to life for the summer, and even the street itself was devoured by roots.

“At last, I shall taste a calm life,” he was saying to himself. “I shall watch the birth of spring in the still, deserted forest.”

The journey appeared long to him. He was as much fatigued, after those few hours of weeping and sleeplessness, as if he had watched at the bedside of a dying friend for weeks. When he arrived at Fontainebleau, he proceeded at once to a notary's to ascertain if he could rent a cottage near the edge of the forest. He was directed to several, and the one that attracted him most had just

been vacated by a young couple who had spent nearly all the winter in the village of Montigny-sur-Loing.

“Are you alone, monsieur?” asked the notary, who suspected a romance, and, though a grave man, was smiling to himself.

“Yes, I am quite alone.”

“Without even servants?” said the notary, surprised.

“Without even servants,” repeated Mariolle. “I left mine in Paris. I will engage some here. I come here to work in absolute retirement.”

“Oh! you will have quiet enough at this season.”

A few minutes later an open landau was conveying Mariolle and his baggage toward Montigny.

The forest was awakening. At the feet of the tall trees, whose tops were covered with shady leaves, the shrubbery was thick and bushy. The early birch, with its silvery branches, seemed already dressed for the summer, while the immense oaks showed only green tufts at the ends of their branches. The beech trees, opening their pointed sprouts,

were shedding the last of the dead leaves of the preceding year.

Along the road the grass, which was not yet hidden by the impenetrable shades of the forest, was thick, bright, and glistened with new life ; and the odor of the new growth, which Mariolle had already perceived in the Avenue des Champs Elysées, now enveloped him, drowning him in an immense bath of vegetable life, now germinating under a spring sun. He inhaled long breaths of it, like a convict just liberated from prison, and, with the sensation of a man who has but broken his chains, he extended his two arms indolently over each side of the laudau, allowing his hands to almost touch the wheels.

It was so good to breathe this free, pure air. But how much he would have to drink, and drink again for a long time, of this air, before he would become impregnated with it and his sufferings lessened ; before he would at last feel that cool breath gliding through his lungs to heal this bleeding wound in his heart.

He traversed Marlotte, where the coachman pointed out the Hotel Corot, which had

just been opened, and was greatly praised for its originality. They then followed a road with a forest on their left, and a great plain with clumps of trees here and there, on their right, skirted by hillocks on the horizon. Then they entered the long street of the village, a street, white and blinding, between two interminable lines of small houses covered with tiles, and where he caught glimpses of enormous lilacs blossoming above the garden walls.

This street followed a narrow valley leading to a small stream, the sight of which enraptured Mariolle. It was a narrow, rapid and agitated stream that washed the foundations of the houses on one side, while it bathed a vast prairie on the other.

Mariolle immediately found the cottage he was searching, and was quite enchanted with it. It was an old house that had been restored by an artist, who, after a residence of five years there, had wearied of it and was now letting it. It was very near the shore, separated from it by a pretty garden terminating in a terrace of linden trees. The Loing, just liberated from a dam by a fall of

one or two feet, flowed rapidly along this terrace.

“I shall cure myself here,” thought Mariolle.

As all the details had been arranged with the notary in case the cottage should be found suitable, Mariolle notified him of his acceptance through the coachman, who returned at once. He then bestirred himself to find servants, and he was soon installed in his new home.

The ground floor consisted of a parlor, dining-room, kitchen, and two other small rooms; the floor above contained a large bedroom, and a sort of boudoir, which the artist-proprietor had occupied as a studio. All this was furnished with that care and forethought we exhibit when pleased by the country or the house. It was now a little disordered, and had that air of widowhood and abandonment seen in houses deserted by the owner.

One felt, however, that this little house had been but recently occupied. A soft odor of vervain still pervaded it. “What, the odor of that simple perfume, the vervain,” thought Mariolle. “Happy man; for the woman that

occupied this house before me was, evidently, not complicated."

The day soon passed in these numerous occupations. Toward evening he seated himself near an open window, inhaling the soft and damp freshness of the dewy verdure, and looking at the long shadows cast by the setting sun on the green prairie.

The voices of the servants, chatting while preparing his dinner, came to him softly from below, while from without came the sounds of the lowing of the cattle, the barking of dogs, and the voices of the peasants, driving home their cattle and talking to each other from both sides of the river. All this exercised a calming and restful influence over him.

He asked himself, for the thousandth time since the morning: "What did she think when she received my letter? What will she do?" Then he asked himself: "What is she doing at this moment?" He looked at his watch—half-past six. "She was at home and receiving."

He could see the drawing-room where the young woman was seated chatting with the

Princess de Malten, Mme. de Frémines, Massival, and the Comte de Bernhaus.

A sudden anger entered his soul. He would have wished to be over there. It was the hour when he usually arrived. And he felt an uneasiness, not a regret, for his will was firm, but a species of physical suffering, similar to a patient who has been refused his customary dose of morphine.

He no longer saw the prairies, nor the sun disappearing behind the hillock in the horizon. He saw her only, in the midst of her friends, a prey to those worldly anxieties that had robbed him of her.

“But I must forget her,” he said, aloud, as he arose and walked down to the terrace.

The spray of the water, agitated by its rapid descent from the dam, arose into a cool mist from the river; this cooling sensation chilled his already saddened heart, and he returned slowly to the house.

Dinner was ready, but he ate little; then, having nothing to do, and feeling overcome by that uneasiness that had taken possession of him a few hours before, he retired, closing his eyes to invite sleep and forgetfulness; but

in vain. His thoughts saw and suffered, for they never left that woman.

“Who would become her lover now?” Comte de Bernhaus, no doubt! He was the lover suitable for this vain creature; a man of elegance, and much sought by women. He pleased her, for to conquer him she had made use of all her arts, although the mistress of another.

Under the sway of these devouring ideas, his soul became numbed; losing itself in somnambulistic conjurations, in which she appeared incessantly with this man. All through the night he saw them around him, braving and irritating him, then disappearing, as if to permit him to at last find sleep, only to reappear and reawaken him by an acute spasm of jealousy in his heart, as soon as forgetfulness had again enveloped him.

At sunrise he jumped out of his bed, and went out into the clear morning air, and walked on into the forest.

The sun glistened through the almost naked branches of the oaks on the green carpet at his feet; further on, he could see the shrubbery in which innumerable lit-

tle yellow butterflies appeared like dancing flames.

A hillock, almost a mountain, covered with pines and grayish rocks, appeared at the right of the path. He ascended it slowly, and when he had reached the summit, he seated himself on a large stone, for he was almost exhausted. His limbs trembled under him, and he was faint with weakness; his heart was beating violently, and his whole body seemed bruised by an inconceivable weariness.

This exhaustion, he knew, did not come from fatigue; but it came from "Her," from that love that weighed him down like an intolerable burden; and he murmured: "What misery! why has she such power over me, I who have never taken of existence only what was necessary to taste it without suffering."

His attention, over-excited and sharpened by the fear of that disease, which would, perhaps, be difficult to overcome, turned to himself and searched his soul to its innermost, trying to better understand, to unveil to his own eyes, the "why" of this inexplicable crisis.

"I have never been an enthusiast," he

thought. "I am not a passionate or an exalted person ; I have more judgment than instinct ; more curiosity than appetite ; more fancy than perseverance. I love things of this life without even becoming much attached to them—with the sense of the expert, who tastes without becoming intoxicated, who is too wise to lose his head. I reason everything, and usually analyze my tastes too well to be blindly overcome. That is even my greatest defect, the unique cause of my weakness. And that is how that woman succeeded in imposing on me, in spite of myself, in spite of my fear and my knowledge of her, and she possesses me as completely as if she had gathered, one by one, all the diverse aspirations within me. I have scattered them toward inanimate things, on nature, which charmed and moved me ; toward music, which is an ideal caress ; toward thought, which is the gluttony of the mind ; and toward all that is agreeable and beautiful in this world.

"Then I met a creature who gathered all my hesitating and changing desires, and, turning them toward herself, changed them into

love. Elegant and pretty, she pleased my eyes; witty, intelligent and crafty, she pleased my soul; and she pleased my heart through the mysterious delight of her contact and presence, by a secret and irresistible emanation of her person that conquered me like the benumbing influence of certain flowers.

“She has replaced everything within me, for I have no more aspirations, no needs, no desires, no cares for anything.

“Formerly I would have trembled and vibrated in this awakening forest. To-day I do not see it, I do not feel it, I am not here; I am always near her, whom I wish to love no longer.

‘Then, I must kill my thoughts by fatigue, or I can never be cured.’

He went down the rugged path, and continued to walk with rapid strides. But his troubles crushed him as if carried on his shoulders.

Suddenly he stopped; “I am not walking,” he said; “I am flying.” In fact, he was flying, pursued by the anguish of this broken love.

Then he went on more slowly. The aspect of the forest was changing, becoming denser

and more shady, for he was entering the warmest part of that admirable grove of beech trees. Not a single trace of winter remained; it was spring that seemed born in the night it was so fresh and young.

An immense vault of leafy trees veiled the sky. It ascended indefinitely, dominating the young shrubbery at the feet of the gigantic trees, and covering it with a thick cloud, through which glistened a cataract of sunlight. This fiery shower glided through the expanded foliage, which seemed no longer a forest, but a dazzling vapor of verdure, illuminated with golden rays.

Mariolle stopped, moved by an inexpressible surprise. Where was he—in a forest? Or had he fallen to the bottom of the sea—of a sea full of foliage and of light, an ocean gilded with green light?

He felt better, farther from his unhappiness, more hidden, calmer; and he sank down on this carpet of dead leaves. Enjoying the cooling contact of the earth and the pure sweetness of the air, he was soon invaded by a desire, vague at first, then more precise, of sharing the charming solitude with some one.

“Ah ! if she were only here with me,” he exclaimed.

Suddenly a vision of Mont-Saint-Michel arose before him, remembering how different she had been over there from what she had been in Paris. During these few hours, spent on the shivering sands on the shore of the sea, she had loved him a little ; indeed, on the inundated road, in the cloister where she had murmured that one word, “ André,” she had seemed to say “ I am yours ;” and on the “ Fool’s walk,” where he had almost carried her through space, she had a sort of tenderness for him then, which had never returned since her coquettish foot had touched the pavements of Paris.

But here, with him, in this glistening bath of verdure, in this sea of foliage, would not that fugitive and tender emotion she had experienced on the Norman coast have re-entered her heart ?

He remained there stretched at full length, still bruised by his thoughts, his gaze lost in the sunlit billows of the foliage ; and little by little numbed by the great tranquillity of the forest, he fell asleep ; when he awakened,

he was surprised to find that it was two o'clock in the afternoon.

He arose less sad, less ill, and resumed his walk. He soon found his way out of the forest, and entered a path which diverged into six avenues, stretching far away, and lost in the leafy distance in an atmosphere tinted with emerald. A post indicated the name of this place, and bore this inscription: "The king's bouquet." It was really the capital of the royal county of beech trees.

A carriage was passing, and Mariolle engaged the driver to take him to Marlotte, from whence he proceeded to Montigny after eating a copious dinner at the tavern.

He remembered having seen this tavern the previous day; it was the "Hotel Corot," decorated on the model of the Chat Noir of Paris.

As he entered the dining-room he saw a young woman, a servant no doubt, standing on the top of a ladder. She stood on the tips of both feet, then on one only, supporting herself with one hand on the wall, and putting away old plates on a high shelf, with the other hand, with movements full of grace and

suppleness. As her back was turned to the door, she did not at first see Mariolle, who stopped to admire her. "She is very graceful," he said to himself; "she reminds me of one of Prédolé's figures, full of suppleness and grace."

He coughed, and she nearly fell in surprise, but, quickly recovering her equilibrium, jumped from the ladder with the lightness of a rope-dancer, and came quickly forward to serve the guest.

"What will monsieur have?" she asked, smiling.

"Breakfast, mademoiselle," he replied.

"It will be dinner, rather," she said. "It is now half-past three."

"Let us call it dinner if you wish. I lost my way in the forest."

She was so graceful and pretty that his gaze followed her as she waited on him. Her skirt was turned up, revealing a pretty little foot; the sleeves of her dress were tucked up, exposing her shapely arms; and her corset molded her pretty, slim waist; of which she was undoubtedly very proud.

Her face was somewhat red from exposure

to the sun, but of the freshness of an expanding flower, with bright brown eyes, a mouth full of pretty teeth, and an abundance of brown hair revealing the lively energy of her vigorous young body.

She brought him radishes and butter, and then left him. He had asked for a bottle of champagne, and drank it to the last drop, then, after his coffee, this was followed by two glasses of kummel. And, as he had only eaten a little cold meat and bread before leaving home, he was numbed, relieved by a powerful dizziness which he took for forgetfulness. His ideas, sorrows, anguish, seemed drowned in this clear wine, and, little by little, it changed the torture of his heart into sluggishness.

He walked slowly back to Montigny, and reached home so fatigued by his day's ramble that he fell into a sound sleep soon after retiring.

But he was soon again awakened, tormented by the same nightmare. He could see her always near him, and de Bernhaus was still at her side. "I am jealous, now!" he said to himself, at last, "and why?"

But he soon understood why. Notwithstanding his fears and sufferings, as long as he was her lover, he felt that she was faithful ; faithful without impulse or much love, but with a loyal resolution. But now that he had broken the link, given her her freedom, and that all was over, would she remain without other *liaison*? She would no doubt for some time — and then? Did not this fidelity perhaps come from a vague presentiment, that, if she abandoned him through weariness of their love, she would have to replace him through weariness of solitude? Are not lovers sometimes retained with resignation through the fear of their successors? She was no prude *bourgeoisie*, but a worldly philosopher, who did not fear a secret attachment, but whose indifferent heart shuddered with repugnance at the thought of a succession of lovers.

He had liberated her — and now? Now she would certainly take another! and that other would be the Count de Bernhaus. He was sure of it.

Why had he broken with her, when she was faithful, friendly and charming? Why?

Because he was a sensual brute, who did not understand the finer sentiments of love.

Was this really the cause? Yes—but there was something else! It was the fear of suffering, of enduring for years the torture of the last few weeks. Weak, as he had always been, he recoiled from this pain, as he had all his life recoiled from great efforts.

He was, then, incapable of following a thing to the end, of throwing himself into a passion, as he should have thrown himself into science or art, for it is, perhaps, impossible to love much without having suffered much.

He tossed restlessly on his bed until dawn, when he arose, and walked down to the river bank.

A fisherman was casting his net in the agitated waters below the dam, and Mariolle watched him as he withdrew it over the bow of the boat, and the wiggling fish glistened through the meshes like living silver.

The damp freshness of the morning air, and the mists arising from the waterfall, brilliant with innumerable rainbows, calmed his agitated nerves, and the swift current at his feet seemed to carry his misery away in its

incessant and rapid flight. "Truly, I have done right," he said. "I should have been too unhappy had I remained."

He dallied over his breakfast as long as possible, that the day might seem shorter, but the expectation of his mail disturbed him. He had telegraphed to Paris, and written to Fontainebleau, to have his letters forwarded, and still he had received nothing. The sensation of being forgotten began to oppress him. Certainly he could not expect to find anything agreeable or consoling in that little black box in the possession of the carrier, nothing more than commonplace communications or useless invitations. Then, why did he so strongly desire those unknown papers, as if they contained the salvation of his heart? Was it that he clung to the vain hope that she would write to him?

"At what time does the mail arrive?" he asked of one of the servants.

"At noon, monsieur," she replied.

It was just twelve, and he went to the window, to listen to the passing footsteps, with growing uneasiness. A knock on the outside door startled him. It was the carrier,

but he brought only one newspaper, and three unimportant letters. He soon wearied of the newspaper, and went out.

What would he do? He stretched himself in the hammock for half an hour, and then an imperious need of change seized him. Would he go to the forest? Yes, the forest was delicious, but the solitude was even more profound than in the house, or the village, where the noise of life was sometimes heard. And the silent solitude of the trees and the leaves impregnated him with melancholy, and with regrets, drowning him in his misery. His thoughts went back to his long walk of the day before, and he again saw before him the pretty waitress at the Hotel Corot, and he thought: "I will go there to dine." This was a good idea, it was an occupation, a means of passing a few hours away, and he set off at once.

He passed through the long road of the village, between the two rows of tiled covered houses. The peasants were engaged in domestic occupations in front of their houses. An old woman, bent down with age, with grayish-yellow hair, for peasants

seldom have real white hair, passed close to him. She was looking straight before her, unconscious of her surroundings, with eyes that had never seen anything but the few simple objects necessary to her poor existence.

Another woman, younger, was hanging out clothes before the door. The movements of her arms raised her skirt, exposing thick ankles incased in coarse blue stockings; her waist was large, her bosom as flat as the chest of a man; in fact, it was a body without form.

Mariolle thought: "And these are women!" The vision of Mme. de Burne arose before his eyes, in her exquisite elegance and beauty; a jewel of human flesh, coquettish, and decorated for the gaze of men; and he shuddered with the anguish of an irreparable loss.

He then walked on faster, to shake this thought from his heart.

When he entered the hotel, the little waitress recognized him at once, and came to meet him.

"Good day, monsieur," she said, pleasantly.



“Good day, mademoiselle,” he replied.

“Do you wish for something to drink?” she asked, smiling.

“Yes, for I am thirsty; then I shall dine here.”

They first discussed what he should drink, then what he should eat. He consulted her that he might hear her speak; for she expressed herself well, with that brief Parisian accent, and an ease of elocution as graceful as the ease of her movements.

“She is very agreeable,” he thought, as he listened; then he asked, aloud: “Are you a Parisian?”

“Yes, monsieur,” she answered.

“How long have you been here?” he continued.

“Two weeks, monsieur.”

“Do you like the place?”

“Not yet; but it is too soon to know; and, then, I was tired of Paris, and the country has done me good. That is why I came here. Here is your vermuth, monsieur.”

“Very well, mademoiselle. Pray tell the cook to be careful with my dinner.”

“Do not fear, monsieur.”

He went out into the garden, and seated himself in an arbor, where his vermouth was soon brought to him. Here he remained until sunset, listening to the singing of a robin in a cage, and watching the little waitress, who, becoming conscious of his admiration, glided in and out in her coquettish and graceful way.

He returned home as on the previous day, with his heart enlivened by a bottle of champagne; but the darkness of the road and the coolness of the air soon dissipated his slight dizziness, and an invincible sadness again overcame him. He fell asleep that night, asking himself these questions: "What shall I do? Shall I remain here? Am I condemned to drag on this miserable existence forever?"

The next morning, as he stood contemplating the fisherman drawing in his seine, he was seized with a desire of fishing also. The man from whom he purchased the necessary articles having offered to guide his first efforts, Mariolle accepted the offer gladly, and at half-past nine, after great efforts and assiduous attention, he succeeded in landing three small fishes.

This, however, soon wearied him, and he again took the road to Marlotte, only to kill time, as he said to himself.

“Good morning, monsieur,” laughed the little waitress, as she saw him.

“Good morning, mademoiselle,” he said, smiling in return.

She had now lost some of her timidity ; and he made her speak of herself. He soon found out that her name was Elizabeth Ledru.

Her mother, a seamstress, had died the previous year ; then her father, who was always intoxicated, and had lived from the united labor of his wife and daughter, disappeared ; for the girl, when left alone, could not supply him sufficiently. At last, weary of her solitary occupation, she had engaged as waitress, and, one day having served the proprietor of the Hotel Corot, he was pleased with her, and offered to take her to Marlotte. She had accepted, and proved herself a great attraction to the newly opened establishment. Mariolle drew all this story from her by adroit questioning, and he was much affected by the picture of this desolate home ruined by

a drunkard father. Alone and almost a wanderer, the sympathy of this stranger gained her confidence, and she related all the details of her pure and simple life.

“And —— you will be a waitress all your life?” he asked, when she had ended.

“How can I tell, monsieur? One never knows what to-morrow may bring.”

“Nevertheless, you must think of your future,” he added.

Her face assumed an expression of meditation and uneasiness, but soon resumed its cheerfulness.

“I will take what comes,” she answered, briefly.

He returned a few days later, then again and again, vaguely attracted and soothed by the innocent babbling of this lovely girl.

But in his lonely walks in the evenings, on his return to Montigny, he would again be overcome by terrible attacks of despair when his thoughts turned back to Mme. de Burne, and he would be torn by regrets and ferocious jealousy. He had heard nothing of her, having written to no one since his exile from Paris. Therefore he knew nothing, but could

only conjecture the progress of the *liaison* he had foreseen between his former mistress and the Comte de Bernhaus. This idea became more and more fixed each day. That man, he thought, is all that she desires—a lover, distinguished, assiduous, without being exacting, satisfied and flattered by the preference of this delicious and skillful coquette.

One day, as Mariolle reached Marlotte, he saw that one of the arbors was occupied by two dissipated-looking young men, wearing student's caps and smoking long pipes.

The proprietor, a big man, with a florid complexion, came forward to welcome this guest, evidently becoming interested in this faithful diner.

“I have two new guests,” he said, smiling, “two artists, who arrived yesterday.”

“Those gentlemen over there?” asked Mariolle.

“Yes; they are already known, the smaller one having obtained the second medal last year.” And, having told all he knew of the artists, he asked:

“What do you wish for to-day, monsieur?”

"Send me a vermouth, as usual," ordered Mariolle.

Elizabeth soon appeared, carrying a tray, with a bottle and a jug of water. And, seeing her, one of the artists called out:

"Well, *petite*, are you still angry?"

She did not reply, and, when she approached Mariolle, he saw that her eyes were red.

"You have been weeping!" he said.

"Yes, a little," she answered, simply.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Those two gentlemen over there have behaved badly to me," she said.

"What have they done?" he asked.

"They insulted me," she replied.

"Have you complained to the proprietor?"

"Oh, monsieur—the proprietor—the proprietor—I know him too well," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Tell me about it," he said, irritated and moved.

She then related the brutal conduct of the two profligates, and this brought back her tears, asking herself what she would do; lost

in this country, without protection, without support, and without resources.

“Will you enter my service?” said Mariolle, suddenly interrupting her. “You will be well treated, and, when I return to Paris, you will be free to do as you please.”

She looked at him, first in surprise, then said, quietly, “I am quite ready, Monsieur.”

“How much do you earn here?” he resumed.

“Sixty francs per month, besides what I receive from the guests. In all, about seventy francs.”

“I will give you a hundred,” he said.

“A hundred francs a month!” she repeated, in surprise.

“Yes; is it satisfactory? You will only have to take care of my room and my clothes.”

“I accept, monsieur,” she answered, delightedly.

“When will you come?” he asked, drawing two louis from his pocket, and adding: “Here is your earnest penny.”

“I will be there to-morrow, if I have to call on the mayor for assistance,” she said, with a bright smile.

CHAPTER II.

ELIZABETH arrived at Montigny early next day, followed by a peasant, with her baggage in a wheelbarrow. Mariolle had rid himself of one of the old servants by a liberal compensation, and she took possession at once of the little room vacated by her.

When she presented herself before her new master, she appeared a little different to what she had been at Marlotte. She was less expansive, more humble; she was now the servant of the monsieur, whose modest friend she had been under the arbor of the tavern.

In a few words he told her what would be required of her. She listened attentively, and at once assumed her place.

A week went by without bringing any perceptible change. Mariolle, however, remarked that he remained at home more than before, having now no pretext to walk to Marlotte, and that the house seemed less lugubrious than in the first days of his resi-

dence there. The intensity of his misery was lessened, and a deep melancholy, like a slow chronic disease, had replaced the sharp pain at his heart.

All his past activity, the curiosity of his mind, his interest in things that had hitherto occupied and amused him; all these were now dead in him, replaced by a disgust of everything and an unconquerable apathy that did not even leave him the desire of going out. He now left the house but seldom, going from his parlor to the hammock, and from the hammock to the parlor. His only distractions consisted in watching the fisherman casting his net, and looking at the flowing Loing.

After the first few days of reserve and timidity, Elizabeth, with her feminine tact, noticed the constant sadness of her master, and one day, becoming bolder, she said to him:

“Monsieur is very lonesome here?”

“Yes, quite lonesome,” he replied, resignedly.

“Monsieur should go out,” she ventured.

“That would not interest me,” he replied.

From that day she began to shower secret and devoted attentions on him. Each morn-

ing he found his parlor filled with flowers, and perfumed like a conservatory. Elizabeth must have taken advantage of the wanderings of all the urchins in the neighborhood, who always returned from the forest with their hands filled with primroses, violets, and golden buttercups; she also secured the little garden of the village that the peasants tended so carefully morning and night. Notwithstanding his distress and torpor, he felt grateful to her for these little attentions.

He began to think she was becoming prettier; that her face was paler, and more refined. He even noticed, one day as she was serving his tea, that her hands were becoming whiter, her nails well cared for, and irreproachably clean. Another time he remarked that her feet were encased in almost elegant shoes. Then, one afternoon she came down from her room in a charming gray dress, simple and tasty.

“Why, Elizabeth, you are becoming a coquette,” he exclaimed, as he saw her.

“I? Oh, no, monsieur,” she stammered, blushing. “I dress a little better because I have more money.”

“Where did you buy that pretty dress?” he asked.

“I made it myself, monsieur.”

“You made it yourself?” he echoed, in surprise. “But when did you find time? I see you working about the house all day long.”

“Why, in the evening, monsieur,” she laughed.

She then related how the merchant at Montigny had brought samples from Fontainebleau; how she had chosen this and paid for it with the two louis given her by Mariolle as earnest money. As to the cutting and fitting, that did not trouble her much, as she had worked for a dressmaker for four years.

“It is very becoming and pretty,” he could not help saying, and she blushed again to the roots of her hair.

When she had gone he asked himself, “Can it be that she is in love with me?” He reflected, hesitated, doubted, and finally convinced himself that it was quite possible. He had been kind, compassionate, and almost a friend to her. It would certainly not be astonishing that she should become attached to him after all he had done for her. The idea,

moreover, was not disagreeable ; this little person was really very pretty, and did not look like a servant. His vanity, so crushed and wounded by another woman, was flattered, soothed, almost comforted by the thought. It was a compensation, very slight, it is true, but a compensation nevertheless ; for, when love comes, wherever it may come from, it is because the object is capable of inspiring it. His unconscious egotism was satisfied ; the contemplation of this little heart animated and beating for him, would be a pastime, and perhaps a comfort. The thought of shielding this child from what he himself so cruelly suffered, to have more mercy for her than had been shown him, never occurred to him ; for no compassion is ever mingled with sentimental victory.

He observed her more attentively, and soon saw that he was not mistaken. Her renewed attentions revealed it more plainly each day. As she brushed past him one morning, while waiting on him at breakfast, he perceived an odor of perfume emanating from her clothes ; the odor of a cheap and common perfume, obtained, no doubt, from the merchant or the

druggist of the village. He then made her a present of a bottle of delicate perfume, which he used in his own bath, and of which he carried a large quantity wherever he went. Later he also gave her some fine soaps, dentrifice, and some poudre-de-riz. He subtly assisted this transformation, more apparent and more complete each day, following it with a curious and flattered eye.

While still remaining a faithful, discreet servant, she was becoming a lovely and affectionate woman, in whom all the coquettish instincts were innocently developing.

He was gradually becoming attached to her; he was interested, touched and grateful. He played with this awakening tenderness, as one in weary hours toys with whatever can amuse him. He felt for her no other attraction than that vague desire that attracts men toward an agreeable woman, whatever she may be; a pretty servant or a peasant, with a form like a goddess, a sort of rustic Venus. He was especially drawn toward her because he found in her something of the true woman. A confused, irresistible need of this had sprung from the

other, the woman he had loved, who had awakened in him that invincible and mysterious taste for the neighborhood and contact of women, for that subtle ideal aroma of all charming creatures for the men, in whom still survives the immemorable attraction of the feminine being.

This tender, incessant and secret attention, more perceptible than visible, enveloped his wound in a soothing shield, rendering it less sensitive to the returns of anguish.

As he had left no direct address, his friends respected his silence, and he was tormented by the absence of news and information. From time to time, as he glanced over the morning papers, he saw the names of Lamarthe and Massival among a list of people who had assisted at a grand dinner, or taken part in a fête. One day he saw Mme. de Burne's name cited as one of the most elegant and beautiful woman at the ball given at the Austrian embassy. The name of the Count de Bernhaus followed a few lines below. He shuddered from head to foot, and for hours his heart was torn by jealousy. That supposed *liaison* was now beyond doubt to him!

It was one of those imaginary convictions, more harassing than a certainty, for they haunt us, and we are never rid of them.

Finding it impossible to tolerate these suspicions and uncertainties, he wrote to Lamarthe, who, he thought, had perhaps guessed his misery, and could answer his surmises without being directly questioned.

One night, therefore, a long letter, vaguely sad, full of dissimulated interrogations and of lyrism on the beauty of the spring in the country, was dispatched to the novelist.

Four days later, as he opened his mail, he recognized at a glance the firm handwriting of the novelist.

Lamarthe spoke of all their friends, without giving any more details on Mme. de Burne and Bernhaus than of any one else. He wrote in that artificial style which leads to the point to which he wishes to attract the attention, without revealing his design.

The result of this letter was that Mariolle's suspicions were confirmed. His fear would be realized to-morrow, if it were not already.

The life of his former mistress was still the same; agitated, brilliant and worldly. His

friends had spoken of him after his sudden disappearance with an indifferent curiosity, supposing he had left because weary of Paris.

After reading this letter, he spent the day stretched out in his hammock. He neither dined nor slept during the entire night. The next day he felt so fatigued, so discouraged, and so weary of those monotonous days spent between that deep, silent forest, now black with verdure, and that annoying little river flowing beneath his window, that he became quite feverish, and could not leave his bed.

When Elizabeth came, in response to his summons, she was surprised to find him still in bed.

“Monsieur is ill?” she asked, turning pale.

“Yes, a little,” he replied.

“Shall I send for the doctor?” she asked, anxiously.

“No; I am subject to these slight indispositions.”

“What can I do for you, monsieur?” she resumed.

I will take my bath as usual, and you may bring me some eggs for breakfast, and a cup

of tea now and then." But about noon he became tired of remaining in bed, and grew impatient.

He called Elizabeth incessantly, with the capriciousness of a sick person, and she would become uneasy and sad, trying to soothe and amuse him. Seeing how agitated and nervous he was, she proposed to read to him.

"Do you read well?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur, I always took first prize in reading at school, and I read so many novels for mamma that I have even forgotten the titles."

He was curious to test her ability, and sent her to his library in search of the book he preferred to all others, "Manon Lescaut."

She assisted him to sit up in bed, placing a chair and pillow behind him, and then commenced. She read well, in fact, very well; gifted with an accurate accentuation and an intelligent pronunciation. She became interested from the first in what she read, and, as she went on, she showed so much emotion that he interrupted her to interrogate and converse.

She answered the questions he asked with

an innate sense of love and passion, but with an understanding somewhat obscured by popular ignorance. And he thought to himself: "This young girl would become intelligent and witty if she were instructed and developed."

That womanly charm he had before felt in her now influenced him in this warm and tranquil afternoon, mingling strangely in his mind with the mysterious and powerful charm of Manon.

He was lulled by her voice, entranced by that fable, so well known, but always new, and he dreamed of a mistress, fickle and seductive as that of Grioux, unfaithful and constant, human and tempting, even in her most infamous faults; created to evoke in man all he has of tenderness and of anger, of attachment and passionate hatred, of jealousy and of desire.

Ah! if she he had loved, had only had that loving perfidy of this irritating *courtisane* in her veins, perhaps he would never have gone away; for Manon deceived, but she loved; she lied, but gave herself unreservedly.

After this day of indolence, Mariolle, when



night came, fell into a dreamy sleep, in which all these women were confounded. Having undergone no fatigue during the day, his sleep was light, and an unusual noise in the house suddenly disturbed his slumber.

Once or twice before he had heard footsteps, and almost imperceptible movements during the night. This noise seemed to proceed from the lower floor, and, being unable to sleep again, he listened attentively. As it continued, he arose, and, lighting his candle, he looked at the clock. It was scarcely ten yet. He dressed, and, placing a revolver in his pocket, descended, cautiously, to the lower floor.

He entered the kitchen, and was astounded to find a fire in the furnace. The noise had now ceased, but, after a few seconds, he thought he heard a movement in the bathroom. Approaching cautiously, he pushed the door suddenly open, and was dumbfounded to find Elizabeth standing near the mirror, drying her pretty hair. She gave a wild cry, but before she could fly, he caught her in his strong arms, and was

kissing the pouting lips. She understood, and, lifting her arms, placed them around his neck.



CHAPTER III.

WHEN she came to him next morning, she trembled so violently, as she met his eyes, that she almost spilt the cup of tea she carried.

Mariolle came toward her, and, taking the tray from her hands, placed it on the table.

“Look at me, child,” he said to her, as she kept her eyes on the ground.

As she raised her eyes to him, he noticed they were filled with tears.

“Do not weep,” he said, tenderly.

As he pressed her in his arms, he felt her shivering from head to foot. He understood that it was neither regret nor remorse that moved her thus, but true happiness. A strange egotistical contentment, rather physical than moral, came over him, as he pressed this loving little heart to his bosom. He felt that same gratitude that a wounded man, lying by the roadside, would feel toward the passer-by that would succor him; and he also pitied her a little in the bottom of his heart. He

looked at her, pale and tearful, her eyes burning with love, and he said to himself, "She is indeed beautiful. How quickly a woman becomes transformed, becomes what she should be according to the desires of her heart or the needs of her life."

He led her to a seat, and took her hands in his, those poor, hard-working hands, that had become white and soft for him, and very tenderly, with adroit phrases, he spoke of the attitude they should maintain toward each other. She was no longer his servant; but they must keep up appearances to prevent scandal. She would now assume the position of a sort of housekeeper, and would read to him frequently; this would serve as a pretext for their new relation. In a little while, when her position as reader would have become fully established, she would sit at his table.

"No, monsieur; I will remain your servant," she replied, simply. "I do not wish any one to know what has taken place between us."

And no amount of persuasion would make her recede from this determination. And

when he had finished his breakfast, she took up the tray as usual, while his eyes followed her out of the room with a tender expression in them.

“She is a woman !” he thought, when she had gone. “All women are equals when they please us. My servant has become my mistress ; and from a pretty girl she will become a charming woman !—at all events, she is younger and fresher than the women of the world. What does it matter, after all ? How many celebrated actresses have come from the gutter ? Nevertheless, they are received as ladies, adored like heroines in romance, and princes treat them like sovereigns. Is it because of their talents, doubtful very often, or their beauty, often questionable ? No. But a woman always obtains that position in the world, which she imposes by the illusion she can produce.”

As he took his walk that day he felt less lost, less abandoned. The forest seemed less deserted and silent ; and the thought of Elizabeth’s face, brightened up by a smile of gladness and a look of tenderness at his return, hastened his steps homeward.

For a whole month it was a true idyl of love on the shores of this little river. Mariolle was loved as few men have been, foolishly, blindly ; she loved him as a dog loves his master, or as a mother loves her child.

To her, he was heaven and earth, pleasure and happiness. He responded to all her ardent and innocent expectations, giving her in a kiss all she could experience of ecstasy. He filled her heart and soul ; and his words intoxicated her like the first wine imbibed by a youth.

But, though he appreciated this love and devotion, he still remained sad. His little mistress pleased him, but another was wanting. And when he walked through the prairies, or on the shores of the Loing, he incessantly asked himself: "Why this sadness that never leaves me?" and, as the remembrance of Paris came back to him, an intolerable restlessness overpowered him, and he would return to the house to escape from himself.

Then he would throw himself into the hammock, and Elizabeth would read softly to him. Even as he listened and looked at her, his

thoughts went back to those long evenings spent in the drawing-room of his beloved ; then a burning pain of regret would pierce his heart, the tears would come to his eyes, and he felt an irrepressible desire to return to Paris.

“ Why do you weep ? Are you suffering ? ” would ask Elizabeth, seeing his melancholy.

“ Kiss me, child,” he would answer, simply. “ You do not understand.”

Then he recommenced his long walks through the forest, with the obscure hope of leaving some part of his misery at the bottom of a ravine, behind a rock, or in the thick shrubbery, like a man who, wishing to rid himself of a faithful dog without killing it, tries to stray it in distant rambles.

One day, in one of his long ramblings, he returned to the country of the “ beeches.” It was now a somber forest, almost dark with its impenetrable foliage. He penetrated under this immense vault, and, as he followed a narrow path, he stopped, astonished, before two interlaced trees.

No stronger or more moving figure of his love had ever struck his eye, or his heart—a vigorous beech embracing a slender oak.

This beech, like a despairing lover, encircled the oak in its two formidable branches as if they were restraining arms. The other, held in the close embrace, stood erect, its tall, slim figure towering above the beech, as if in disdain. But, notwithstanding its flight into space, that haughty flight of an outraged being, it carried in its sides the two wounds that the irresistible branches of the beech had dug in its bark. Linked forever by these closed wounds, they grew together, mingling their saps, and through the veins of the violated tree flowed the blood of the victorious one.

He was slowly returning home, when he saw at the foot of a tree a mud-stained dispatch, lost or thrown away by some passerby. Had this little piece of blue paper now lying at his feet brought sad or happy news to some heart?

He could not help picking it up and curiously looking at it. He then unfolded it, but the dampness of the forest had nearly obliterated the writing; he could only decipher the words: "Come —— I —— four o'clock."

He was assailed by cruel and delicious recollections of the many dispatches he had

received from her ; sometimes to fix the hour of their rendezvous, others to say she could not come. Nothing had ever moved him or caused his poor heart to palpitate so violently as the sight of these blissful or despairing messages, which he would never again receive.

He again wondered what had passed since he had left her. Had she suffered ? had she regretted the lover driven away by her indifference ? or had his sudden departure only wounded her vanity ?

And his desire to know became so violent and so tenacious that an audacious idea suddenly overcame him. He turned his steps to Fontainebleau, and went at once to the telegraph office. His heart was agitated by hesitation and vibrating with inquietude ; but an irresistible force seemed to drive him on.

With a trembling hand he took up a form, and wrote the address of Mme. de Burne, then the following :

“ I must know what you think of me ! I can forget nothing.

“ ANDRÉ MARIOLLE,
“ Montigny.”

He caloulated, that, if she deigned to reply, he would receive her letter in two days, but he never left the villa during the next day, through fear and in the hope of receiving a dispatch from her.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, as he was swinging himself indolently in the hammock, Elizabeth announced that a lady awaited him in the parlor.

His surprise was so great that it almost suffocated him, and he walked toward the house with faltering steps and a palpitating heart. Yet he scarcely dared hope she had come.

When he opened the parlor door, Mme. de Burne arose to meet him, with a slight reserve and constraint in her smile and manner.

"I have come to see how you are," she said, extending her hand. "The dispatch gave me no details."

He turned so pale at the sight of her that a gleam of joy came into her eyes; he was speechless through emotion, and he could only kiss the hand she extended him.

"How kind you are," he muttered, at last.

"No; it is not that; but I do not forget my

friends." She looked at him with that searching gaze that ransacks the thoughts to their roots and unveils all artifices. She was evidently satisfied, for a smile lighted up her face.

"Your hermitage is very pretty," she resumed. "Are you happy in it?"

"No, madame," he replied, with a sigh.

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed. "In this beautiful country, with that magnificent forest and the charming little stream? Why, you should be quite happy here!"

"No, madame, I am not happy."

"And why?"

"Because it does not make me forget," he replied.

"Is it, then, indispensable to your happiness that you should forget something?" she asked.

"Yes, madame, it is indispensable."

"May I ask what it is?"

"You are aware of it."

"And, then ——?"

"Then, I am very miserable," he added.

"I inferred as much from your telegram," she said, "and that is why I came, having resolved to return at once if I were mistaken."

Then, after a short silence, she added: "Since I am not to return immediately, may I not visit your property. That path under the linden trees looks very inviting, and it would be so much cooler there than in this parlor."

She wore a mauve toilet that harmonized so well with the verdure of the trees and the blue of the sky, and looked so charming and pretty, that he looked at her in amazement as if she were an apparition. Her flaming blonde hair was covered by a large mauve hat, trimmed with ostrich feathers; and her carriage, so proud and haughty, brought into this little country garden something of the abnormal, the unexpected, the exotic, the odd sensation of a dream, an engraving, a painting by Watteau, sprung from the imagination of a poet or a painter, and transported into this country garden, through a fancy, to show how beautiful she was.

Mariolle gazed on her, and felt his passion return in all its intensity.

"What is that young girl who opened the door for me?" she suddenly asked.

"My servant," he answered.

"She has not the appearance of—a servant."

"No, in fact, she is quite pretty," he said.

"Where did you find her?"

"Not far from here! She was working in a hotel where the guests menaced her virtue."

"Which you have saved?"

"Which I have saved," he repeated, blushing.

"To your own profit, perhaps?" she continued.

"To my profit, certainly, for it is pleasanter to have pretty faces around you than ugly ones."

"And is that the only interest she inspires in you?"

"She has also inspired me, perhaps, with the irresistible need of seeing you again; for all women, when they attract my eyes, even for a second, always bring you to my thoughts."

"What you say is all very pretty; but does she love her rescuer?"

He blushed furiously. The certainty that all jealousy is good to stimulate the heart of a woman decided him, with the rapidity of lightning, to tell her half the truth.

“I know nothing,” he replied, hesitatingly. “It is possible. She exhibits a great deal of solicitude and care for me.”

“And you?” murmured she, in a tone of slight vexation.

“Nothing can make me forget you!” he exclaimed, fixing his eyes, burning with love, on her.

This was also an evasion, but she did not remark it, this phrase seemed to her the expression of an indisputable truth. Could a woman like her doubt it? In fact, she did not doubt it, but was satisfied, and did not give Elizabeth another thought.

They now reached the lindens, and, seating themselves on two camp chairs, watched the flowing of the stream.

“What have you thought of me?” he asked.

“That you were very unhappy,” she replied, sympathizingly.

“Through my own fault or through yours?” he asked.

“Through our fault,” she replied.

“And, then?”

“And, then,” she resumed, “I felt that you were very excited, and very foolish. I con-

cluded that the wisest plan consisted in allowing you to become calmer, and I waited."

"What were you waiting for?" he asked.

"For a word from you. I received it, and I am here. Now we can converse like sensible people. Then, you still love me — I do not ask this as a coquette — I ask this of you as a friend?"

"I still love you," he said, simply.

"And what do you propose?"

"I know not; I am in your hands."

"Oh! I have very clear ideas on the subject; but I will not tell them without knowing yours. Tell me of yourself. What has passed in your mind and in your heart since your flight?"

"I have done nothing but think of you."

"Yes, but how?" she asked. "In what way? What were your conclusions?"

He told her of his resolution to forget her, of his flight, his arrival in this great forest, where he saw and found nothing but her.

He told her of his days haunted by the remembrance of her; his nights tortured by jealousy. He told her all, in good faith, with

the exception of Elizabeth's love, whose name he did not mention.

She listened, sure that he told the truth, convinced by the knowledge of her dominion over him, still more than by the sincerity of his voice, and charmed at having him back, for she really loved him.

He lamented his sad position, without ceasing, speaking exultingly of all he had suffered, and all he had thought, and he reproached her again, in a passionate plea, but without anger or bitterness, conquered by the fatality, this impotency of love, under which she labored.

"You have not the gift of loving," he repeated. But she interrupted him with a flood of arguments.

"I am at least faithful," she said. "Would you be less unhappy," she went on, "if, after having adored you for six months, I loved another man?"

"Is it, then, impossible for a woman to love but one man?" he cried.

"We cannot love forever," she answered, quietly. "We can only be faithful. Can you believe that this foolish delirium of the senses

can last many years? No! no! The majority of passionate and sentimental women spend their lives in romancing. The heroes are different, the events unexpected and changeable, and the denouement is variable. It is amusing and interesting for them, I admit; for the emotions of the beginning, the middle and the end are acted over again each time. But when it is finished it is over—for him. Do you understand?"

"Yes, there is truth in what you say, but I fail to see what you are coming to."

"To this: no passion can last very long. I mean the brutal and torturing passion, from which you are still suffering. It is a painful crisis that I have brought on you; very painful, I know it and I feel it by—the sterility of my love and the paralysis of my powers of expansion. But this crisis will pass; it cannot last forever."

"And, then?" he interrupted, anxiously.

"Then I consider, that, for a woman as calm and reasonable as myself, you can become quite an agreeable lover, for you have a great deal of tact; but, on the contrary, you would

be an atrocious husband. But, then, good husbands do not exist."

"Why keep a lover that you do not love, or that you no longer love," he asked, irritatedly.

"I love in my own way, my friend," she replied, quickly. "I love dryly, but I love."

"You particularly feel the need of being loved, and that it should be visible," he said, resignedly.

"It is true; that is what I like," she replied. "But my heart also needs a hidden companion. That selfish taste for public homage will not prevent me from being faithful and devoted; and I believe I could give to the man I love something I could not give to others—my loyal affection, a sincere attachment, the secret and absolute confidence of my heart, and in exchange receive from him the rare and sweet impression of companionship with the tenderness of a lover. It is not love, as you understand it; but it is something, nevertheless."

"May I hope to be that lover?" he muttered, trembling with emotion.

"Yes; some day when you suffer less. In

the meantime you must be resigned to undergo something for my sake ; and, since you must suffer, it were better it should be near me than at a distance."

Her smile seemed to say : " You should have more confidence in me," and, as she saw him so affected, she felt a sort of satisfaction, which made her happy in her own way, like a hawk seizing his fascinated prey.

" When will you return ?" she asked.

" Why — to-morrow," he replied.

" Very well ; you will come and dine with me," she said. " And now I must go," she resumed, consulting the little watch hidden in the handle of her umbrella.

" Oh ! why so soon ?" he asked.

" Because, I must take the five o'clock train," she answered. " I shall have several people dining with me. The Princess de Malten, Bernhaus, Lamarthe, Massival, Maltry, and a new one, M. de Charlaine, the explorer, who has just returned from Camboge, after an enchanting voyage. He is quite the rage."

All these names, one after another,

wounded him like the stings of a wasp ; they contained venom.

“Then,” said he, “you must allow me to accompany you, and we shall go through the forest.”

“Very well,” she said ; “but first order some tea and toast for me.”

But, when they went in search of Elizabeth, she was not to be found. Mme. de Burne was not surprised, besides, what fear should she now have of the little servant ?

They entered the landau, and Mariolle ordered the coachman to take the road leading through the “Gorge-aux-Loups.”

When they reached the tall trees, casting their calm shadows, their enveloping freshness filled with the songs of the birds, she was seized with that inexpressible sensation with which the all-powerful and mysterious beauty of the world moves the heart through the eyes.

“How beautiful, how good and refreshing,” she exclaimed.

She breathed this pure air with the happiness and emotion of a sinner who receives the sacraments ; she was penetrated with love, and she placed her hand within his.

But he thought, "Ah ! yes, it is nature ; it is a repetition of Mont-Saint-Michel." They soon reached the station, where the train was waiting.

"To-morrow at eight o'clock, madame," he repeated.

He then re-entered the landau, satisfied and happy, but still tormented, for it was not over.

But why struggle when he could bear it no longer. She possessed an incomprehensible power over him, stronger than himself. To fly from her did not deliver him, did not separate him from her ; but it was an intolerable privation, while, if he could resign himself to it, he would at least have all that she had promised, for she never lied.

During their interview she had not even had the impulse of offering him her lips. She was always the same, nothing would ever change in her, and perhaps he would always suffer through her in the same way. The recollections of those hours of expectations he had already passed with the intolerable certainty that he never could touch her heart, made him dread the coming struggles

and the same distresses for the future. Nevertheless, he was resigned to suffer everything rather than lose her again, resigned to that eternal desire now become a sort of ferocious appetite flowing through his veins and burning his flesh.

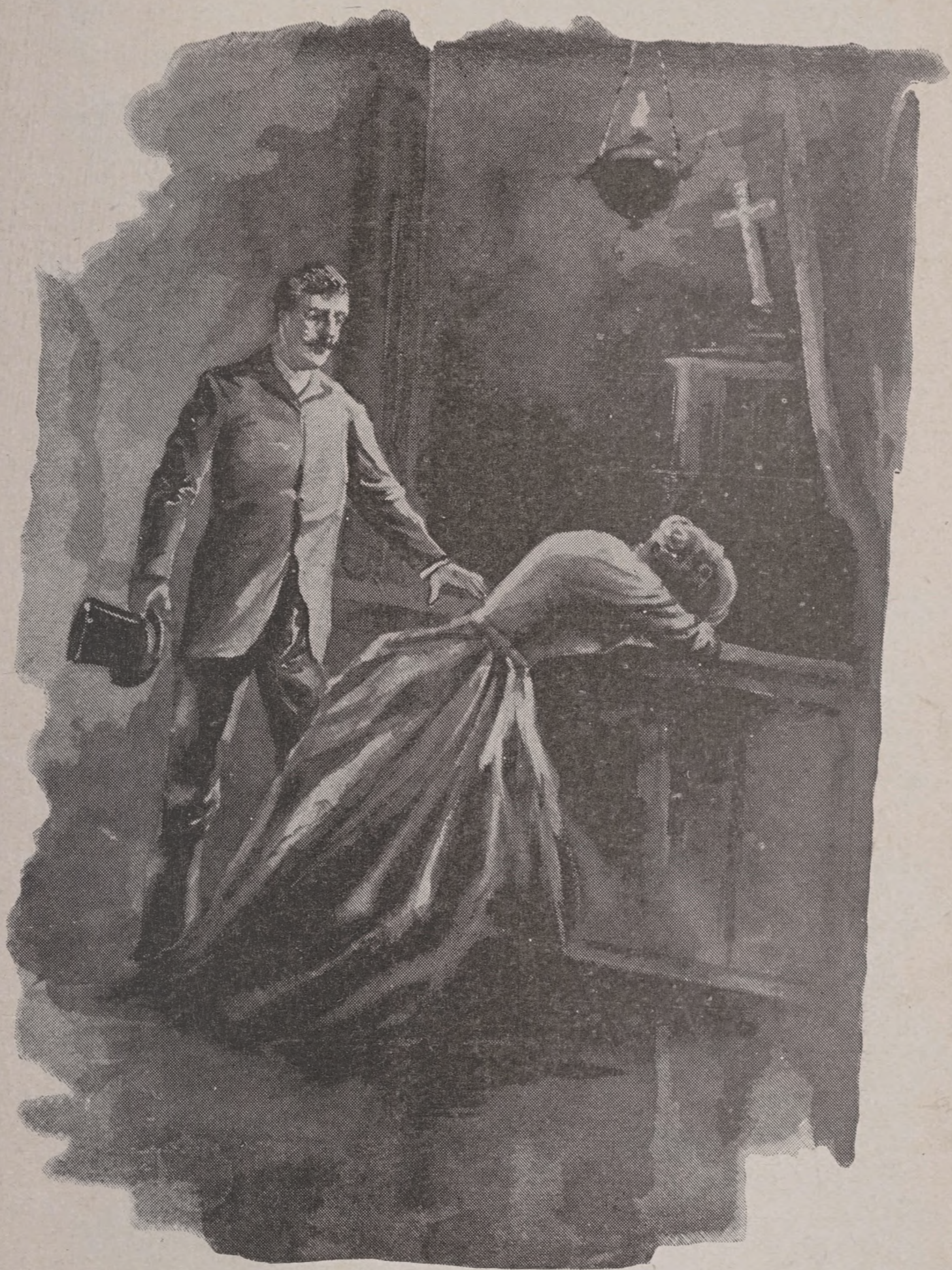
The rage that had often seized him when returning alone from Auteuil was already recommencing, and made him shudder in the landau, when suddenly the thought of Elizabeth, fresh, young, and pretty, also awaiting him with her heart filled with love, and her lips ready for kisses, calmed him. Even at this moment he felt some grateful attachment for this charming child. Would she not be to his parched soul the little spring found at the halting-place after the day's suffering, the hope of fresh water which sustains the energy when traversing the desert.

But when he entered the house the young girl had not reappeared.

"Are you sure she went out?" he asked, uneasily.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the old servant.

He went out, hoping to meet her, and, as



he was taking the road along the little valley, he saw the old church before him. It was large and low, crowned with a short steeple.

A suspicion, or a presentiment, pushed him on. What strange suspicion might have been born in her heart? What had she thought? what had she understood? Where would she have taken refuge, if not there, if a shadow of the truth had passed through her mind?

The temple was dark, for it was now midnight. Alone the little lamp at the end of its chain revealed in the tabernacle the ideal presence of the Divine Consoler. Mariolle, with light steps, passed along the pews, and, as he reached the sanctuary, he saw a kneeling woman, with her face buried in her hands. When he came nearer he recognized Elizabeth.

He touched her on the shoulder, and she gave a start, turning her face toward him. She was weeping.

“What is it?” he asked her.

“I understand it all,” she murmured. “You are here because she grieved you, and she has come to take you back.”

“You are mistaken, child,” he said, touched by her grief. “It is true, I am going back to Paris, but I shall take you with me.”

“It cannot be, it cannot be,” she cried, incredulously.

“I swear it,” he protested.

“When?” she asked, eagerly.

“To-morrow,” he answered.

Her tears flowed anew, as she murmured :
“I am so happy ! so happy !”

He passed his arm around her waist, and almost carried her out into the deep shadows of the night, and, when they reached the river bank, he seated her on the grass at his side. He could hear the beating of her heart, and she was still sobbing violently. He was seized by remorse at sight of her grief, and, as he pressed her to his heart, he whispered words of love, sweeter than she had ever heard.

He promised to love her well — he did not say “love” short, without qualifications — he promised her pretty apartments, near his own, with fine furniture, and a servant.

She became quiet, listening, reassured, little by little, unable to believe that he would

abuse her confidence, understanding, moreover, from the accents of his voice, that he was sincere. Convinced at last, and dazzled by the vision of being a lady in her turn, she, a poor servant in a tavern, to suddenly become the friend of so rich and elegant a man, she was intoxicated by covetousness, gratitude and pride, which mingled with her attachment for André.

Throwing her arms around his neck, and covering his face with kisses, she murmured : "I love you so much ! I have no thought but of you."

"My darling, darling child !" he exclaimed, moved by her caresses.

She had already almost forgotten the apparition of the stranger who had caused her so much grief a little while before. Nevertheless, an unconscious doubt still floated in her mind, and she asked, in a caressing voice :

"Truly, you will always love me as you do here ?"

And he replied, boldly : "I will love you always as I do here."

END.

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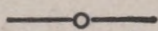
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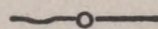
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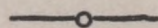


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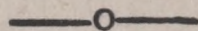
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